UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
PRINCIPALS' STORIES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

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A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Educational Administration

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall, 1998

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ABSTRACT

Who are you? asked the person. "I am the story of myself." came the answer. Personal stories have become a powerful method for reliving and re-telling experiences. They are a link between our formal and informal knowledge. As such, stories of practice help forge bridges across the gap between theory and day-to-day life in classrooms. They provide important insights into this latter world.

The participants in this study were nine principals ranging in administrative experience from two to 27 years. There were six females and three males, all but one of whom are currently principals from public and separate school districts in Alberta. Through recorded conversations both one-on-one and in a large group, the study focused on the responses of these nine principals firstly, to a radical policy change in teacher evaluation in Alberta, and secondly, to questions of how principals enable reciprocal processes that foster teachers' professional growth.

These principals indicated their concerns about the change in teacher evaluation policies and the skills needed to support teachers in new approaches, in particular, annual professional growth planning. They unanimously commented that building relationships is the critical first step in helping persons to grow. They also recognized that the role of principals in "posing leading questions that break set with old ideas" (Lambert et al., 1995) is clearly a leadership prerogative. Recognizing that their leadership qualities are symbolically represented in their schools was another outcome of this study. Lastly, the principals engaged in this research study acknowledged that their capacity as learners was increased as a result of their work in a knowledge community such as was structured for this study.

Overall, the study was a fifteen month project which delved into the complex lives of principals on the professional knowledge landscape using conversations, personal narratives, and school tours to give direction and inform. The group became a connected, caring, committed knowledge community where persons felt safe to declare themselves, disclose their fears, and share their successes. Through this personal experience, the principals engaged in the study acknowledged the work that they must do to enable the professional growth of their teachers. As storytellers, each has a gift and a legacy to share what they have learned and to affect the learning of others in the future.

In Their Own Words:
Principals' Stories of Professional Development

is dedicated to the memory of

my father,

William J. McVea,

an influential storyteller in my life.

Acknowledgements

Two symbols represent my special thanks to the persons below.
The first, the native storyteller whose stories
kept the communal memory alive and growing,
and second, the inukshuk, an Inuit rock icon,
arranged on the landscape to resemble a human form.
Both are fitting symbols of the direction and friendship
offered to me during this dissertation journey.

For their guidance and assistance, I thank my academic advisors
Dr. D. Jean Clandinin and Dr. B. Maynes.

For their friendship, direction, and most of all, their stories of experience,
I thank my research group of eight principals.

For their continued advice and editorial support,
I thank my dissertation committee.

For his support and confidence in me,
I thank my husband and partner, John Brosseau

For consistently offering kindness and respect,
I thank my mother, Dorothy R. McVea.

For breaking the loneliness and offering a safe place,
I thank my family and friends.

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Chapter One

Looking Inwards

We begin on an afternoon in February. The windows are closed to the harsh cold of a winter day. Snow is piled almost to the sill.

Lunch is finishing and the conversation has been animated. Crackers and cheese are abandoned for sweeter foods and coffee refills are evident. The walls of the room, a pale turquoise, glow in the fading sunshine. This could be Ottawa, Saskatoon, even Cranbrook. Long sleeves, winter boots, dark colors–let's say we're in Edmonton nearing the end of the twentieth century.

This is a continuing education center. Sitting at the head of the table, with papers and microphone before her, Margaret could be the leader but she seems reluctant to begin. Beside her is a younger woman, with an edge, you can tell. Her speech is quick and filled with images. Amber is quiet but forthright and animated when the conversation moves her.

The other women at the table are friendly to one another. Emily is the most experienced and describes herself as the "wise old owl" of the group. She is known by the others around her as competent and creative. She has an inquisitive air about her and is articulate and passionate in her remarks. Beside Emily is Joan, a demonstrative person who loves to talk. She has a unique drawl at the end of her sentences, perhaps a result of speaking two languages. Full of enthusiasm, Teresa leans forward to talk to Emily. They know each other from previous lives and there is much catching-up to do. Finally, Helen, always rushing, with many tasks that need her attention, is a compassionate, caring person, looking for balance in her busy life.

The men in the group are no less interesting. Bob is known as warm-hearted and frequently touches people as he speaks openly and with confidence. Next to him, and in contrast, is Paul. Quiet, and serious, Paul rarely initiates a conversation in the group but is articulate in his turn. Lastly we meet Michael. Relatively inexperienced, somewhat spontaneous are words that could aptly describe him. Yet, underneath, there is a strong work ethic and a highly developed sense of justice.

You haven't guessed right if you think this is a random selection of adults. They are gathered for a purpose and they are only vaguely aware of that. Today's luncheon meeting will clarify the group's intent and formally introduce them to one another. Conversations move about the room: decision-making, budgets, staffing, conferences are some of the topics. The real conversation is here. The rest is for the record.

So there you have them. Emily, Teresa, Joan, Bob, Amber, Helen, Paul, Michael, and Margaret, a group of principals gathered together for a qualitative research project. They're about to embark on a journey of discovery, assisting teachers in their search for professional growth. Can they see their way clear to some explanation of how principals enable teachers to grow and continue to learn? What are their stories of building communities of learners in schools? Is it reasonable to hope that the group of people gathered here will grow and learn in this environment? Could this approach be an example, a model, perhaps of how learning communities develop and evolve? Only time will tell. Their perceptions of the issues and their stories lie ahead.

Fiction and Narrative

Stories are the lifeblood of human communities. They relay to others what the community and its individuals are about. Stories help people to express their moments of rejoicing and mourning. With the help of stories we can delight in each other's joys and share one another's conditions (Peck, 1987, p. 60). Stories soften the difficult and harsh realities of our day-to-day life by introducing shades and colors of emotion. By linking facts and feelings, stories help our brains to bridge logic and emotion, enabling us to give a deeper scope to one-dimensional events. Stories encourage us to relish and recollect events through their telling and re-telling. Enhanced and colored by our perceptions, stories reveal not only a surface message but also the tellers' view of the world. Thus, stories are able to help us to interpret ourselves better and to understand the people with whom we work and play, more authentically.

> *Six months into my research for this project, I was involved in an event that gave me great insight about stories. Walking my dog early one morning, we were attacked by a larger dog. Without the help of a neighbor, both of us would have been in serious trouble. Because of the ferocity of the attack, the local television news and daily paper took up the story. Both chose to tell it from slightly different angles, but nevertheless, the story made good press.*
>
> *I was deluged with calls and visits from friends and neighbors wanting to hear my story. And in almost every case, these people had their own story to tell about a similar incident. I was struck by the prevalence of stories in our lives, and the importance of telling and retelling a story to help us understand, celebrate or endure an event.*
>
> *I was further struck by the revelations stories permit about their tellers and listeners. This event, as difficult as it was, acknowledged for me that telling our stories and in turn, listening to other people's stories, is fundamental to our understanding and acceptance of*

> *our day-to-day existence, both its alleluia times and desert experiences.*

Telling Stories

Because my teaching has always focused on the significant personal experiences in my life, narrative inquiry methods spoke to me immediately. Teaching is about personal experience–inward feelings, hopes, and reactions, external conditions of reality and context–all tempered by a time frame of past, present, or future. The stories I am about to tell focus on people whose narratives I collected over a period of fifteen months in 1997-98. They are principals of schools in and around Edmonton, Alberta. Each person had many stories, which they have shared formally and informally with others and me in the group. To aid the reader I have shared the stories in an italic form. Italics will always signal that the words in the passage belong to one of the group members and are personal comments about the issue at hand.

Roland Barthes (1982) points out that narratives exist everywhere in the world–in books, movies, myths, and comic strips, in every society–and we come to them at an early age. Narratology, the study of how stories work and how readers come to understand them, helps us to understand our subjective responses to stories, or the shared response of a community to a story. It helps answer the questions about the elements of narrative and the similarities and differences between them. The way we approach the text is not right or wrong but is justified by the interesting insights that the analysis can yield. We supply our own credentials, culture, tastes, and prejudices–our perspective modifies our understanding. In Barthes'(1975) words, "What I enjoy in a narrative, is not directly its content, or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon its fine surface" (p. 12-13). In narrative inquiry, empirical data continue to be central to the work. But even in the collection of the data, interpretation is occurring. This doesn't, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) caution, turn narrative into fiction but rather subjects it to the addition of terms derived from literary criticism. As a research group, we were engaged in "conversations, a generic term covering many kinds of activities" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, p. 421). And, because conversation entails listening, there is opportunity to probe deeper into the surface talk and uncover more than in an interview format. However, collaborative conversations must be done in a climate of respect, mutual trust, and caring. Relationship, again, is central.

Oakley (1981) commented that oral conversations between pairs or groups of individuals must be marked by equality felt among participants and flexibility to allow participants to establish the form and content of their experience. The research participants who gathered together were known for their empathy and respectful treatment of people. All were reputed to be good conversationalists and in the first interview setting had no trouble talking about themselves and their lives. Working with a group of eight persons required careful monitoring so that all participants who wished to had an opportunity to speak. This was important to ensure their satisfaction as well as ensure that many different stories were told.

Because conversation highlights the importance of partners over topic, the importance of being there and wanting to be there was often more important than the importance of what was being discussed. This encouraged a pledge to learning and exploring, partner above principles, and gave us boundaries for how we enacted those things we endorsed. In such conversations, people learned not only facts, but also trust, confidence, and the importance of the relationship in human interactions (Noddings, 1994).

The stories shared here also hold layers of meaning not always easy to identify. While there was a surface similarity in the words, values and beliefs expressed in their stories, the sources of the stories were clearly their own. Different persons expressed this perspective differently but the intent was the same. Amber described it this way: *I know I see things very differently and so when you talk about cover stories, we very much live the cover stories on the surface. Yet, something is happening and deep down it's something entirely different and that's become more and more important for me to take a look at.*

There was also a sense of urgency in the group to spend time together, sharing information and telling stories. As one principal put it: *I've learned that we don't talk enough, we don't share our stories when we go to those principals' meetings. I've been a principal for close to twenty years and you know there are many people sitting in that room and the only thing I know about them is their name and what school they're principal at. We need to really dialogue to get a sense of unity.* This sentiment was echoed often in the conversations the group and individuals shared.

Elliot Eisner (1991) cautioned that before we recommend change in schools, we must seek to understand life in classrooms. His answer lies in adopting a qualitative inquiry approach. "[Qualitative inquiry] is not some form of exotic activity reserved for those of special talent or for those who have been properly initiated into special forms of cultural anthropology. It pervades our day-to-day judgments and provides a basis for our most important decisions" (p.15). His concept of experience is "a cognitive achievement–we learn to see those aspects of the world that are subtle and complex" (p. 17). To Eisner, experience has a great deal to do with qualities and the process of categorization that allow space for further reflection. "The interplay of image and reality" between conversation and teaching helps us "to experience and respond to a wide array of meanings, many of them nonverbal" (p.19).

Experience as Teacher

As we participated in sharing stories, the more reflective we became about the construction of personal knowledge. Personal experiences–inward feelings, hopes, and reactions, external conditions of reality and context all tempered by a time frame–helped us to reconcile the importance and relevance of our stories. In response to Connelly and Clandinin's words, "We have been impressed with how universal the word *experience* is in education" (1994, p. 414), we would say: *teaching is the telling of our experiences.* As one member described her growth in another small group: *I only went to four or five meetings over the course of the year, but it took me from this nice, safe, grassy place to a completely different place in terms of what I thought professional development was and could be, should be for me, anyway. And I live that every day that I'm in the school now, and I'm still pulling those stories apart to some degree. I haven't figured out a lot of it yet.*

The three critical dimensions to human experience–significance, value and intention (Carr, 1986)–were mirrored in different ways by different people. As one person said: *It's so great to sit around a table and know that there is a thread. We* *obviously see things differently but I really sense a connection and a safety here. So I think I'm not the only one, there are some souls out there who may see some of the kinds of things that I'm seeing and value that. It gets down to valuing things, what's important and what isn't.*

My Context for Telling Professional Development Stories

The context for this study emerged from a personal need to rethink my own questions and concerns about the meaning of teaching and learning. Because we are in a time of educational history when many questions about the future of schools and public education go unanswered, the need to ask difficult questions and engage in dialogue is critical. The climate in which we are living at present tends to present a picture of opposing forces. On the one hand, there is a strong pull from the public towards a back-to-the-basics movement, and, on the other, a desire for an authentic, student-centered learning environment. Teachers, especially those who teach grades 3,6, or 9, where achievement examinations are given, are under surveillance to account for student learning using paper and pencil tests that minimize what has been learned. As a principal in an elementary school attempting to progress and experiment, I was often verbally attacked by parents demanding a return to a past they fondly remembered, where classrooms were silent, students sat obediently in desks, and teachers delivered information authoritatively from the front of the room. Today, the competition for students is fierce as funding follows the child and schools race to attract greater numbers of students. Combined with the growth in numbers of private institutions and charter alternative schools, the school landscape has become a battlefield for educational dollars, standards of achievement, and programs of choice.

As a result, as a principal, I felt I was acting as a manager, an accountant, and a public relations professional more than an educational leader. The we-they perspective felt in the school, in the community, and in the department of education was becoming increasingly real and threatening. Increasing costs and decreasing services complicated the picture. The metaphor that came to mind was that of a tug-of war where educators are pulling for the authentic purposes of learning and teaching against the opposing pull of market demands, pre-defined outcomes and conservatism.

An irony, however, was evident in the face of all of this. Quietly, behind closed doors, I found there were teachers who continue to teach in ways that are purposeful and honor meaning. As well, I found principals who were making an effort to support and dignify the efforts of these teachers and who encouraged a similar conversation of teaching with them. And, in Alberta, the Minister of Education had released a new policy on teacher evaluation declaring teachers as professionals with the wisdom and the judgment to make decisions that are best for the students of Alberta. This policy, if implemented in the constructivist spirit it reflects, in my view, could help return some balance to the educational scene. It may also herald a different form of educational leadership: authentic, respectful, and relational, focusing on making meaning from personal experience and enabling others to do so.

This study, then, reflected a strong pulling for principals and teachers who believe in and exemplify these latter qualities in the larger tug-of-war of education today. It was about how principals and teachers try to engage in conversations about teaching and learning in the context of the pressures to account for student learning and align with ministerial directives. It was about the actions of principals in support of an environment which will inspire the "reciprocal processes" (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, and Slack, 1995) so necessary to learning and teaching. Finally, it was about the stories of nine principals who are working to create opportunities to converse with teachers about teaching and learning in their schools.

What Are We Asking?

In this time of increased interest in narrative and story-telling as a way of knowing (Bruner, 1986), I hope that the stories disclosed here will move readers to tap into their own stories, their experiences, in finding and creating their identity. By prompting principals to tell their stories of what it means to enable teachers to grow and develop as teachers, a deeper understanding of how professionals continue to grow and advance their knowledge of teaching may be promoted. The stories may also teach us about "framing, deepening, and moving conversations about teaching and learning that are fundamental to constructing meaning" (Lambert et al., p. 47). In exploring how principals, through their words and actions with teachers, are "enabling the reciprocal processes that help uncover the possibilities of continuous learning and teaching" (Lambert et al., p. 36), new insights may be derived. The processes include "evoking potential in a trusting environment, reconstructing old assumptions and myths, focusing on the construction of meaning, and framing actions that embody new behaviors and purposeful intentions" (Lambert et al., p. 36).

Building Our Community of Learners

> In the process of living the narrative inquiry, the place and voice of researcher and teacher become less defined by role. Our concern is to have a place for the voice of each participant. The question of who is researcher and who is teacher becomes less important as we concern ourselves with the questions of collaboration, trust, and relationship as we live, story, and restory our collaborative research life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5).

Our community came together for the first time in February 1997. We met in an adult education center and shared lunch together. This helped break the ice and set an informal tone to our meeting. Eleven principals were invited and nine arrived. It was a bitterly cold day and the tenth member had car trouble. When he subsequently missed the second meeting, he chose to withdraw from the group. The eleventh invited principal was unable to find any dates where he could join us for a meeting, thus eliminating himself. And so we established ourselves as a group of nine principals willing to meet on a regular basis to converse and tell stories about professional growth. Ranging in experience from a thirty year veteran to a second year principal, the group of six females and three males became a close-knit community of nine people willing to meet at least once a month to converse and share ideas. The experiences and stories of this particular group uncovered many rich perspectives and promoted some new and different commitments. Our gathering together as persons with a common interest helped us to learn from one another's talk as well as our silences. The thousands of words collected and transcribed illuminated several recurrent themes. First, in their personal stories, related here as narrative portraits, there are obvious differences but frequent similarities. The persons in the group told their stories in one-on-one interviews that were later shared with one another. These stories help to build a sense of community within the research group as well as introducing the research members to the readers.

Our collective story follows. This series of narrative events evolved over approximately fifteen months in different locations. Described here are the overriding issues and unique perspectives that were problematic for everyone. The closer examination of these themes, in turn, promoted another dialogue at a deeper level than the first. In the words of Maxine Greene, we tried, as a group, to "attend to the plurality of consciousnesses–and their recalcitrances, their resistances, along with their affirmations, their songs of love" (1995, p.198) in order to make meaning about the issues before us.

Learning how to learn, the importance of constructing knowledge and the acknowledgment of experience as a significant basis for knowing, was the motivation for assembling this group of principals. Recognizing the critical role principals play in creating a trusting community where staff can make and share meaning for the purposes of growth and development, the intent was to gather the stories from people who are actively engaged in this process. We hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the processes that principals may use in enabling teachers to learn and continue to grow. Since constructivist learning is a social endeavor (Lambert et al., 1995), we were committed as a group to mirror as much as possible a viable community of learners with a constructivist approach. Using Bateson's (1996) description, our community aspired to be an ecological, equitable, and evolutionary one. We aspired to be ecological: fluid, growing, and self-sustaining; equitable in our treatment for each other, and evolutionary, that is, thriving and changing despite setbacks and threats. Working together, relying on and trusting one another are key functions for an equitable group. Leaders and followers were difficult to distinguish in our group–all members participated readily and experience and expertise moved around the group depending on the issue. Ecologically, we sustained one another through group support, communication between meetings, celebration of one another's successes, personal invitations to each others' schools, and shared food and drink. Over the fifteen months we spent together, nine individuals became a community where we shared a commitment and made sacrifices to ensure our survival.

There were various reasons why people chose to join the group. The most evident was expressed by Joan and echoed by others: *Actually one of the reasons I don't mind doing this is because it forces me to be more reflective and during my work life I don't do it as much as I should. I don't know how I affect people–does it make a difference? I can't believe that's the kind of effect we're supposed to have or do have.* It's startling to believe that principals have so little idea of the impact they make. The need for comparing ideas, sharing experiences, and getting up to speed on new developments seems critical. Often the first fifteen or twenty minutes of each session, while we waited for the whole group to assemble, was spent asking questions and getting up-to-date information about how other districts were handling certain issues. One principal described the conversations in the group meetings this way: *I'm very glad to get an opportunity to learn different perspectives but I also like to go beyond my own school district. I think that's very important so that you don't just see the attitudes and the mind sets of the people in your district.*

The members of the group also had lots of questions surrounding their continued growth and well being: *How do we sustain ourselves? We're people who spend a lot of time taking care of people. Who helps us make the links? Who are the linkers in our lives?* This issue came up repeatedly as these principals struggled with the dual problem of enabling their staff to grow at the same time as sustaining their own growth.

The group also has told a collective story developed through our many conversations. This is a story focused on our understanding of professional growth–what it is, how it happens, and the role we play in encouraging and promoting processes that enable professional growth.

For each of us in the group, there was a continual struggle to know ourselves well enough so that we could understand others better. No where is it clearer than in the stories and conversations described ahead. The struggle is in coming to grips with what it means to be a learner and a teacher. The stories these principals tell are rich, colorful descriptions of their complex roles. The learning never stops and for the principal as learner, the teaching never stops. In the words of one member: *I think the one critical piece that I came to learn, as a principal, is that you don't have to be the one with all the answers. All you need to do is ask the right questions and to facilitate the processes. It took me a long time to learn that. I used to think I had to have all the answers and I had to show everyone how to do it, but then I learned that all you have to do is ask the right questions. They already have the answers. You just have to find a way to unpack it. That's a very valuable lesson that I learned.*

In the beginning, our group met at a central location, an adult education center near the university. Five members of the group worked within fifteen minutes of the center. Three others traveled approximately half an hour. One member came from quite a distance, approximately two hours drive away. Most members made appropriate arrangements with their administrative partners to be away from their schools for the series of dates we had chosen. They described their membership in the group as a kind of personal professional development and several commented that they were looking forward to this kind of professional support and an opportunity to discuss questions like "*How do we survive at this time? What do we put on our plate? What do we take off? and What needs to be changed?*"

Each meeting had a slightly different tone. In the early sessions, when we were forming as a group, people listened openly but tended to speak one at a time. As we developed into a more cohesive group, there was an increase in the give and take, an easier repartee. Some people were more outspoken and continually offered ideas to the group. Some days, particularly around the first reporting period in the elementary schools, one or another would sit quietly and afterwards apologize: *I was just too tired to comment today, but I enjoyed listening*. The atmosphere was generally open and easy. No one felt they had to speak to every issue and this, in turn, contributed to the comfort level of the group.

We met thirteen times which for these busy people was remarkable! All nine members attended most meetings. The group also communicated by fax, telephone, and e-mail. At the meetings, we set no firm agenda, but agreed on the starting and finishing times for each session. Some meetings, however, opened with a quotation or a reading to help begin the conversation. At the beginning of our second school term together, our research group purchased copies of The Constructivist Leader (Lambert et al., 1995). While we did not at any time use the text directly in our sessions together, its ideas were considered and referred to as we discussed the role of the principals in fostering the professional growth of teachers.

After four meetings, we decided unanimously that we would like to see each other's schools. The fifth meeting, therefore, was held at Bob's school, a junior high school of 375 students. Emily offered us a tour of her school next and since it was relatively close to Paul's, we organized our sixth meeting around a tour of both schools followed by dinner at Paul's. The following meeting included a tour of two schools and an overnight retreat. Amber, our distant member, invited us to her school and then hosted us in her home. This event was a highlight of our time together. We visited the schools in her town, had dinner together, and then talked and sang until late into the night. It was a great experience for the seven members who were able to get free for the weekend. Finally, we held our last session in early June, when we visited Emily's school and had a wine and cheese celebration to mark the end of the school year together.

At this session the group committed to continuing to meet in the new school year and Michael agreed to host the first meeting of the 1997 school year.

Each of these sessions was unique as the hosting members toured the group around their school and described staff and programs to us. It was obvious that each school had a special, unique story that shared the culture of its community and students. The principals' stories were also evident in each school. From their short notes on the staff whiteboard to their unique office spaces, each told their story differently. Each school story manifested its unique title page and table of contents: attractive, friendly, open, and decorated with pictures of staff, students, art, quotations, or literature.

Breaking the Ice

Our first conversations occurred in individual interviews and provided members with an opportunity to introduce themselves one-on-one to me. By gathering information and stories about the personal background of each principal and collecting the stories of their early experiences in life and careers, I composed a narrative portrait (Bowers, 1993) of each participant, reflecting the stories they felt comfortable sharing with me. The interviews helped me to "explore different ways of thinking about life, to see its pattern as a whole, and to illuminate it " (Bateson, 1989). The history, values, and influences that these principals shared began to form the "community of memory, one that ... is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive memory" (Bellah, 1985) of the larger group.

The interviews were approximately 1 1/2 hours in length and focused on some of the following ideas, most of which were borrowed in part or paraphrased from *Women's Ways of Knowing–The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986):

> *How would you describe yourself to your self?*
> *What stands out in your life over the past few years?*
> *How has your identity been shaped? Family influences? Education? Experience?*
> *When you are learning something you want to know (for the first time), who or what do you rely on?*

> *Is the way you see yourself now (today) different? What led to the changes? Were there significant turning points or events? How do you see yourself changing in the future?*
> *What do you do sustain your growth, the changes?*
> *What will you be like fifteen years from now?*
> *The final question was a statement from Bateson, (1990), "Education, whether for success or failure, is never finished." Participants were asked to comment on this.*

The personal introduction of each of the group members is shared in the pages ahead. Each story tells of a person engaged in living as a mother, father, wife, husband, teacher, principal, man, or woman. Several story lines are familiar and similar: the importance of family, balancing work and career, surviving painful experiences. Others illustrate differences and the individuality of each person in the group: feeling undervalued, being alone, mentoring others. Throughout our months of conversations together, these first stories continued to form the landscape on which other stories unfolded.

I am introduced in the first story, which takes a different format than the others. This introduction is more autobiographical than the succeeding stories and uses stories and descriptions to introduce myself to the readers.

In introducing the remaining eight principals, I have used their own words as much as possible. Their stories come from our earliest conversations and reflections, and are not presented, in any way, as representative of principals everywhere. They tell only about a sample of educators who were interested in exploring how they promote the professional development of the teachers with whom they work.

Introducing Margaret

> *When I returned to a school after ten years in a central office position, a number of things struck me. First and foremost, I was now a principal, and that responsibility*

> *alternately excited and intimidated me. My first impression was that teachers worked very hard for little recognition. Secondly, there was a respect for the principal that went unchallenged, even though I was new and had not yet proven my credibility or capability. The obvious disquietude was another impression. The prisoners–both students and teachers–weren't really sure about the new warden!*
>
> *Accustomed to earning respect through trust and empathy, I set about to build relationships. At first, I encountered some disbelief and trepidation–principals don't act like this. But over time, the teachers and I formed a bond that we strengthened by putting teaching first. Purchasing curriculum materials and technology for the school, and enabling professional development rooted us. When the parent council fought for the fourth "R"–retail–we fought back, arguing that all of our efforts were needed for teaching and learning. We were gaining ground in the tug-of-war! We stood our ground when asked to rebuild the playground before the library. We fought to keep chocolate bar sales out of the school. Time for teaching was guarded to the point that student photos were taken outside of instructional time on a PD day. Teachers felt honored for their important work called teaching, parents came to understand the primary role of a school was learning, and I felt I was a teaching principal.*

This story, as well as the many others that are waiting to be told, are embedded in the larger story of this dissertation. The continuous summoning up of past experiences that give "moments of being" (Greene, 1995, p.115) may give rise to an openness to the text where each reader's perspective affects their understanding. My teaching career, perhaps my personal life as well, has been spent reflecting and acting on the importance of meaningful learning and professional growth. The focus of this writing is a natural outgrowth from my own deeply held views about what it means to be a learner and a teacher.

> *I began to learn about learning and teaching at an early age. Born fifth in a family of ten, there was always "school" going on in our home. Raised by parents, who were educated in Great Britain, learning was always fostered in our growing up years. My sisters and brothers were my first pupils*

> *and teachers. My mother, a primary school teacher, taught each of us to read before we went to school. Dick and Jane was my primer and I still remember the big print and colorful pictures. Over lunch we took turns reading the lives of the saints, poetry or classical literature. Learning was constructed from a vast array of experiences, feelings, and knowledge.*
>
> *Growing up in the fifties and sixties in a big family gave new meaning to the term "home entertainment." We played "Bird, beast," practiced spelling, or did mental arithmetic. We wrote stories, poetry, and play-acted. Over our kitchen table hung a large map of the world sponsored by Cadbury. How we loved to talk about travel to other countries and gaze hungrily at the huge bars of chocolate positioned around the edges of the world!*
>
> *One of our greatest accomplishments was winning a three-speed bicycle in a writing contest–several of us collaborated on the final story! There was always reading, reciting, or some kind of learning going on in our crowded but harmonious home.*

The values and beliefs that I hold as a teacher, principal, and researcher have formed the foundation for my ideological stance. My beliefs and abundant intuitions about the subject at hand color what I see. As a result, my view of the world, my interactions with others and ultimately, my disposition on life is affected and mediated by my ideologies.

I believe that people learn by discovering and constructing knowledge from their past experiences. The act of becoming a "knower" is the act of discovering what it is to know and how to know it. For me, learning is not fixed but created and, as a result, is integrated and connected to my life. The synthesizing of knowledge and the generation of multiple patterns to make a whole is how I learn best. And, while I can acknowledge the rational, objective realities in the world, my belief that these realities are bound and multiplied by our own subjective lenses is not diminished.

I am a generalist at heart yet I have a craving for that specialized knowledge which will aid my understanding of the whole. My learning becomes a part of me and is adapted and adopted into the personal me. I learn best, I believe, when working interdependently, each person providing a piece of the puzzle. This co-constructing approach, with its multiple meanings and understandings, provides a foundation for my interpretative view of the world. Learning is a process and, for me, is facilitated by people's support and acceptance. As such, the relationship in any learning-teaching event is the critical element where my learning is validated by the comments and directions of others. In most learning situations, I prefer to listen first, and then speak. Consequently, it has taken a long time for me to recognize my voice, use it effectively, and value it.

> *The longer I worked with adults, the greater significance stories played. I soon realized that teachers wanted fewer facts and figures, and more stories. They needed to know that you had lived where they had lived and that you had an empathic and practical understanding of their lives. They needed to tell their stories and consciously compare them with yours. You as teacher listened, so that they, too, could listen.*

Narrative inquiry and story telling have a central place in my work because both methods are so directly connected with life and schools. Story telling encourages links between teachers' lives and their beliefs about education. Bateson (1996) describes this condition so clearly: the intertwining of living an educated life with living life is told and retold in our stories. In learning to tell, to listen, and to respond, I ultimately began to uncover significant educational consequences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

> *In 1992, studying gender issues in education with Beth Young, I asked to complete a portfolio as part of my final course credit. A profound experience, it confirmed my view that teaching and learning are best expressed in constructivist, interpretative ways. My portfolio was an interpretive collection depicting my life to date and was expressed in a metaphor of journey. Compiling it was a powerful event and pushed me further into the study of personal experience methods and how we reflect upon and make explicit our growth and development over time. Since then I have completed several other interpretative collections. Each has its own character and context, and, as such, each is quite different. The sharing of these collections with others, as well as my reminiscing about the contents, has generated many stories and conversations.*

My collection of personal artifacts, photographs and memory boxes for the creation of teaching portfolios has been extensive. By collecting "fragments of teaching," small items or event markers, cards, or gifts, photographs and certificates, I have tried to recreate some of my teaching stories. Each portfolio is different because each describes a different stage in my life. My first collection, captured in the metaphor of journey, is a personal reflection of forty years of my life. It includes family photos, pictures, report cards, transcripts, degrees, accomplishments, and personal stories of some of the critical incidents in my life. It is still my most cherished collection.

The following year I constructed a very different portfolio describing my work as a superintendent in a small rural school district. This collection reflects the tasks and dynamics of working with a board, being in a lonely position, the difficulties and successes of regionalization, much of what I experienced that year. It is more bureaucratic in approach and, suitably, reflects the conditions I endured that year.

I became an elementary school principal soon after that. The speed of events, the sheer numbers of things that occur in a day (much less in a year!) are evident in this collection. When I share this portfolio, which I carry around in a Nike shoebox, there is always laughter and amusement from the audience. However, in light of the role of a principal, this collection certainly reflects a "Just Do It!" approach.

Finally, my latest portfolio is an interpretation of my return to university as a doctoral student. For a challenge, I vowed to teach myself the art of publishing on the worldwide web. My most recent portfolio is growing into a multi-media effort with embedded text and real-time audio. This has been the most technically difficult collection to create but this portfolio reflects the stage that I am at presently.

The process of 'writing a life' is a continual one and a changing event. My use of portfolios or interpretative collections to free the narrative of my life has been helpful in allowing me to focus on personal experience: remembering it, feeling it, and giving it expression, form, and meaning. This, in turn, has liberated me to recognize the importance of our experiences and stories to our continuing growth and development as adults and teachers.

My Irish heritage has always leant itself to a good story. My large family and sociable father created an environment where discussion and argument were favored activities. We grew up in a noisy, talkative house where a good opinion, well substantiated, held the day. As a result of that upbringing, I am attracted to narrative writing as a way to express the many stories people have to share. With that brief introduction, I move now to the stories of the other eight principals who shared their thoughts with me.

Introducing Teresa

Teresa, a small, smiling woman with shiny dark hair and an infectious laugh, is the principal of a K-6 school with 370 children. When she introduced herself for the first time to the group, Teresa said *I guess I love what I do...I just love working with the group of people I work with.* On a personal note, Teresa is married with two children, one of whom is studying to be a teacher. Teresa is excited about the possibilities that has offered: *She [her daughter] is so excited about teaching and learning and we have such good conversations.*

Teresa was influenced in her life by a number of people. Her deputy superintendent changed her approach to being a principal. *I think I was well on the track to being a workaholic and I just figured that I could work eighteen hours a day and be on top of things and it would go on forever and no problem.* Then Teresa's father, *a real mentor to me,* died in May, at a crucial time in the school year, and it took the wind out of her sails. *In the following fall I really struggled with whether I really wanted to be a principal and whether it was worth all this effort. I discovered with his [the deputy superintendent's] help that I was just wearing myself out. He took the time to sit down with me on many occasions and say "Look at where you're going, do you really want to do this to yourself?" We got into the whole talk of replenishing ourselves so that when you come to work each day you can be the best that you can be for everyone. Somehow that took root and since that time I have started doing things like making sure every week I build something into my day that makes me appreciate the day or people. This has made a big difference and I'm happier in my work.*

Teresa is the oldest of seven children from a Catholic family. *When you're one of a large family you don't somehow push yourself to be the one that stands out. You have to consider others–we had to make room for others in our lives. We all had to pitch in and to do our bit.*

Teresa's father was a mentor to her and he often repeated sayings to her such as "*A thing worth doing is worth doing well*" and "*If fifty-five's your best, then that's good enough for me, because you did your best.*" Her father was highly regarded in the community and he always set an example of a strong work ethic and service to others.

Other mentors included teachers from the high school Teresa attended. They kept track of Teresa and followed her career, offering her advice and role models. *I kept in touch with them well into university and they came to my graduation party at university, they were big in my life. I think I've been really blessed in my life to have a high level of support, and many role models.*

When it comes to working with staff, Teresa is reflective and appreciative. *I'm like a cabinet minister. I can see the picture and I know how to surround myself with the people who can help me get it done.* When life became difficult on staff with the advent of some new technology, Teresa *bared [her] soul and said: This is something where I'm going to be with you. And if I can be this vulnerable and this afraid, I hope that gives you permission to come along for the ride.*

When learning something for the first time, Teresa is open to others and actively seeks out help. *I'm not afraid to ask for help or just say that I don't know. Then my learning is enhanced because I do not operate in a pretend stance. I would* *lose learning opportunities that way.* She learns best by talking to others and sharing with other people. One of the greatest learnings she feels she has made as an administrator is that she doesn't have to have all the answers. This, she believes, has earned her respect and stature with her staff and colleagues. It has also given those around Teresa the freedom not to know everything and to risk in learning.

When I questioned Teresa about how she sustains herself, she spoke articulately about mental and physical wellness, keeping a perspective, and continuing to learn. The importance for her of replenishing herself on a daily basis was emphasized. Teresa also mentioned the importance of her family and the people she works with as supporters of her wellness. Keeping events in perspective was another important issue. In Teresa's words, *My father used to teach me that having a perspective is sustaining.* She tells the story of a teacher who took her to task on an issue. She felt quite hurt by the event. Asking her father's advice, he counseled Teresa to remember that only one person out of twenty-seven persons on staff had complained!

For Teresa, much of what sustains her comes from being a learner and being interested in things. She is naturally curious and as she puts it *I love to analyze and figure out what makes people tick.* She often asks other administrators outright to tell her about their staff meetings, or what they do as a staff.

There are many things that interest Teresa professionally and personally. For her, every day is an education and she uses every opportunity to continue to learn. At the moment, Teresa is reading *The English Patient, Caring for the Soul,* and *Run, School, Run.* She learned to speak French as an adult, partly out of her own interest and partly to converse with her daughter who is enrolled in a French Immersion program. If she won the lottery, Teresa would like to buy a recording studio and make a record! Barring that eventuality, she would be interested in writing or developing radio/television programs for seniors. Whatever the scenario, Teresa would *pursue some kind of learning, without any pressures, for the sheer enjoyment of learning*. A bonus in her post-work life will be learning without pressure.

Teresa completed our conversation together by commenting on her beliefs about personal professional growth and the direction that this is moving for her. She told this story to illustrate her point: *I often reflect on my position as a leader and think about how I can encourage professional growth in staff. Sometimes the answer seems to lie in the little things or "teachable moments" that arise. I am reminded of an experience that I had in the last few years. As we moved to site-based decision making, there was a parallel event for administrators that meant a very large increase in the use of technology in our daily work. At the time, I had very little interest in technology, although we had purchased a computer and a printer at home for our children. In fact, I always have had an aversion to any kind of machine, and when I came to technology, I would say that the expression, "scared stiff" (from swimming lessons) was apt.*

Meanwhile there was a call and a push for teachers in elementary schools to both implement technology and integrate technology with the curriculum. In our elementary school, we weren't ready for this! How would I lead in an area where I felt such a lack of skill and confidence? I decided to "go public" with the staff and "bare my soul."

At a staff meeting I told them that I was going to take something on that I was really insecure about. I suggested that since I was going to take a leap that we may as well all jump, make the journey together, and support each other on the journey.

Soon someone was suggesting that we all take a course together and we did!...in the evening. My vice-principal and I arranged humorous certificates and a celebration at the end. Guess what? Soon people were chatting in the staff room–"How did you do this? "I can help with that." And on and on it went.

A few years have passed. As for me, I can't live without technology. We have a staff who is very open and who has made great strides in their skills. People openly ask for help. People openly talk about the latest little thing they've learned and pass it on. People continue to take all kinds of courses often rounding up others to go with them.

I think we're a community of learners and Barth's [1990] phrases come to mind: "everyone leads in some way; "everyone is a learner and a teacher."

Teresa portrays the narrative of a caring, loving leader with a thirst for knowledge and learning. She is reflective and has high expectations for herself and others. Indicative of this was her recent application to open a new school in her jurisdiction. At this writing, Teresa is the successful candidate and will be involved in the planning, design, marketing, and ultimate opening of a new elementary state-of-the-art school.

Introducing Joan

Joan, tall with long, blond hair, a mother of two and the principal of a K- 4 school with 430 children *came here to love people* and *to continue to learn until the* *day I die.* Joan had not consciously planned to be a teacher but one person, a religious sister, had a great influence on her: *She gave me a great desire to learn and believe in myself and we all believed we were very special and learned people.* Joan studied for three years in a convent school where she believed the school made a difference in her ambitions in education. The women who were her teachers were *really strong women, a really good example that girls could do anything.*

In her family of origin, Joan was second with three brothers and three sisters. Her father was an important influence for Joan; *he would encourage me to join in watching the news and in discussing what was going on in the world.* Joan discovered something about her father much later in life that took her by complete surprise. In her words: *My mother would read the newspaper every night out loud. And it wasn't until I was grown up and away from home and married that I realized that my father couldn't read. My father was illiterate. But he always wanted us to do really well.* Joan believes that this taught her that learning can happen at any time: *Even though my father didn't learn to read until his fifties, I never saw my father as not being an able person. He was a very smart man. In that sense, there should be an opening for anybody at any time.*

Her first principal, *a man with a warm and generous heart, a wonderful learner to me, always encouraging us,* also influenced Joan. In response to my question about his role in helping shape her identity as a principal, Joan explained: *He always had plenty of time to talk for as long as you liked. We used to all hang out, sit around on the desk, talk for twenty minutes or an hour after school. And it was a great joy in talking, or singing, not well!*

Joan, when she was asked to describe herself, made these comments: *I guess the most important thing about being a principal is being a learner as well. I have to be able to learn. That's got to be the most important thing. I want to see it. It's so important to continue to learn and to enjoy learning. Part of my own personal belief system is that if I'm not having fun learning, I can't be doing it quite right. I mean fun in the way that it's something challenging, exciting, and demanding. But learning should be important for me first and if I value it for myself, then I may create those values, or bring those values to the forefront in the school.*

Joan describes herself as a big picture person, able to make the big leaps but not always able to fill in the steps in between. She relies on her administrative partner to assist with that part of the planning and together they make a good team. As she puts it: *I don't know if you call it visionary, but I love to go and reach out for things but I can't always put all the steps in between.*

When I asked Joan to describe herself she used her sister's words. *She sees me as somebody who's always goal-oriented, always wanting to achieve, always going out but doing more, pushing more. She sees me as always going after something and never being quite satisfied with where I'm at. She thinks, perhaps I should be a little more relaxed or more reflective. She sees me as someone who, at times, is very competitive, a person who wants her school to be the best, to push the teachers.*

Joan has an interesting view of professional development in her school. She believes people will always try to do their best to achieve. *I think there has to be a medium between people who you know are looking out at the horizon for new things and those who are providing stability and growth in different ways. I'm much more* *accepting of the foibles of humanity and much more forgiving of parents, my staff, and myself because most of the time I know people are doing the best they can do. When they are doing that, even if it isn't that good at the time, we are being the best at who we are.*

Joan's story as told to me is a reflection of her beliefs about learning and growth. She is impatient with the speed at which she and those around her learn and always wants to jump ahead and leave the messy details to someone else. Joan, as reflected in this narrative portrait, is struggling to try to make meaning of the world around her and the relationships with her family and colleagues, always with a belief in the importance of trust and connections.

Introducing Bob

I first met Bob when he was acting as a principal mentor in the Educational Policy Studies Master's Program at the University. Bob, tall, slim and very gregarious, has been a principal for over ten years with a large urban board. He came to teaching and the principalship later than others in the group did because he originally planned to be a genetics researcher. Recognizing in the last year of his program that he was a people person, not a lab person, he transferred into education and simultaneously began working in business as well. When the time came, *I made a conscious decision to go into educational leadership rather than go into the business world.* Probably as a result of this, Bob has a wide scope of involvement beyond the school in business and service clubs. He cites these as *wonderful learning experiences, with some great people mostly from the business community.* These business connections have made a good fit for him. As Bob puts it: *Business people* *have this mind set about education that is goes back to their own experiences in school. To change that we have to give them the facts and as we give them facts, you should see their eyes open, so it's great fun for me!*

When Bob first came to his present school, a junior high with 380 students, it was a last minute summons for help. The superintendent called him six days before school was to open in September and asked for his help. The school was in difficulty and needed a fresh start. Bob put it this way: *The first thing I had to do was get my staff on board. I spent a lot of time with staff in their classes telling them what a wonderful job they were doing, getting them motivated again, never mentioning anything negative, always the positive, here's what you're doing right, it's wonderful to see, keep that up, this is great. Going from class to class and sitting with teachers after school got the teachers on side and turned the discipline in the school around.*

Bob is a principal in a school district that has slowly implemented a comprehensive site-based management approach. As a result, principals have the final word in their schools and answer only to the superintendent. This has freed them to make many decisions but they are highly accountable for the consequences. *We just make sure our schools are running fine and they leave us alone. Our communities are happy, our attitude surveys are in good shape, and the kids are achieving. The change in the district's leadership philosophy allowed us to do things as a group of principals. We could exchange kids and whatever we wanted to do, work with the parents say "let's try this." We were empowered to do what we have to, to make do, to make sure the school operates and our kids are getting a good deal. With the empowerment comes the responsibility.*

When I asked Bob about influences in his life he used the question to relate how the support and love in his life has helped him to be a better person and principal. I found it painful to hear Bob recount how, early in his marriage, they lost their first child. A devastating event for him and his wife, it made an impact that was never lost. *Tracey and I lost our first child–he lived for two days. That was critical for our relationship because we had to be very strong at that point and had to grow much stronger immediately because of that. We still reflect about how that changed our relationship together, really cemented it. We're in this for the long haul.* As a result of this early tragedy, Bob nurtures all people and continuously shows love and care for them. He explains this approach eloquently, *I have a huge amount of love in my life and I like to project that onto my students. I have this and I can pass it on to the kids knowing full well how well it works. If a kid feels that they're loved and accepted, they'll do anything for you. That's what I try to inculcate in my teachers. You have to talk dignity and respect and you have to talk hard-nosed and all those things that just make sense. Really it's parenting we're teaching, parenting, and some skills on the side called teaching skills. I spend a lot of time doing parenting with my parents too. It really is love and it makes us more successful. Certainly not everybody is that fortunate and I know that, but I like to try to inculcate those feelings and those actions that result from that into my staff. It's simple stuff but it's everyday stuff–hallway interactions, outside classroom interactions, public domain interactions with a parent or visitor, you want to make sure your staff is treating everybody with dignity and respect. But what it really boils down to is simple stuff– if* *you treat your people well, they'll treat people well. You know we like to do it in all kinds of different ways, professional development is one of them.*

Bob is very clear in his understanding of himself and his outlook on life. He credits several persons with mentoring him as he developed this perspective. One of his early principals had a big impact on Bob and he learned a great deal from him. But even more so, Bob's next principal was his *number one mentor, a lover of life, a questioner, and a rogue.* According to Bob, this man taught him *not to accept what you don't want to accept. Just say no if it's not right. People will come around to realize it's not right and if you're wrong you can always write a letter and apologize.*

In his personal life, Bob has also been mentored and encouraged. Bob's parents both worked and his older siblings had lives of their own, so Bob was left to his own resources. A family who lived next door was very influential. Their daughter was Bob's first love and it was this family that he feels changed his life significantly by encouraging him to make his own choices. This pattern of outside influences on Bob has impacted him all his life. As a result, he tries to live out, in his work as a principal and teacher, the values he gained in those formative years.

On the topic of learning and how he learns best, Bob takes a social approach. *I need the one-on-one stuff with somebody that has at least some of that knowledge. I don't need all of it but I need some of it. Just to get their perspective on it why they might choose to get into this new idea, whatever it is. Because I need an understanding of where they think it might take them that's different from where they are now.* The importance of learning new skills and continuously learning is uppermost in Bob's mind. *We are expected to have some knowledge when we discuss* *with people who want to bounce things. So because of that responsibility, I like to grab onto somebody that's into it and ask why are you doing this, what's in it for you. Then I'll make a decision about it.*

Bob sustains himself by immersing himself in changes. Right now he is doing that in the area of technology and has immersed himself to become an "expert". High expectations are evident: *I like to do things because if you're going to do it, you might as well be good at it. If you can't be good at it, don't do it.*

Bob came across to me as a strong, competitive but compassionate leader with a will to do better for kids. He has had personal struggles that have helped him understand the importance of a loving, caring, respectful relationship. He, himself, is eager to learn and he tries to support continuous learning from a position of trust with his staff.

Introducing Amber

Some very strong stories came through that are becoming more and more telling in my work was among the first things Amber said to me. A principal in an elementary school of 415 students, Amber, black-haired with flashing eyes, is the youngest member of the research group. She is relatively new to the principalship and shared this short anecdote to describe her beginnings: *My first year was a complete blur. I was scared, and I think everybody was scared, and we danced for a little while, and we kind of danced around each other and found ways to dance with each other. And last year we saw a little clearing every once in a while as we got to know each other a little better, and this year it's magical, it's just magical.*

Raised primarily by women *who see the world differently from the rest of the world,* Amber struggles but shows great insight with her perception of the world. *I know I see things very differently. When you talk about cover stories, we very much live the cover stories on the surface. But something is happening deep down. It's something entirely different and that's become more and more important for me to take a look at.*

Amber credits the family she was raised for having a major impact on her future. Her two grandmothers and her mother and aunt were critical supporters in her early years. While they had difficult lives, experiencing divorce and death of a parent early on, they had a positive outlook that they shared and encouraged in Amber. *When life was bleak, it didn't feel all that bleak. There was still lots of love, lots and lots of love, lots of hope, lots of future, always a sense of goodness in the future, not despair. I feel really grounded with my family.* In a crisis, Amber's family was always there and they have always encouraged her to take risks and not be afraid to fail.

A good friend has also become a distant mentor for Amber. Living in Ottawa, the friend, also an educator, is able to share stories freely with her and, in return, Amber feels comfortable confiding in her. This is important, particularly as Amber, at present, does not feel safe confiding in her colleagues in the community.

Another major influence in Amber's life is her husband and partner. This relationship figures prominently for Amber: *He is my best friend. He's just really my arm. I feel like he's a part of me. He's been a really important part of that plan too* *because when I look at where I am now, which is a wonderful place, he's been just a really important part of that story for me.*

When I asked Amber how she approaches new learning for herself, she immediately mentioned going to a person she likes and someone who would help her get unstuck. As she put it, *someone who could throw me a rope to help me pull myself out, who understands that learning is really hard and really painful sometimes and that you just sometimes just need time to get unstuck.*

When I spoke to Amber about learning and how she learns, she struck a different note than other members of the group. Amber doesn't set out intentionally to learn things. From her point of view, learning opportunities seem to come along and she attaches herself to one or another. Amber described learning as a collection of hot air balloons flying above her. When one attracts her attention, she goes with it. Learning comes in spurts, awakenings, "a ha's."

When she returned to school in 1993, Amber had no intention of studying to earn a degree or get a better job because she wasn't interested in becoming a principal. But the experience created an awakening for her and, encouraged by her family, Amber did apply for a leadership position. While she had never planned to be a principal or an administrator, Amber has suffered because others have misunderstood her interest as greed. *Somebody called me ambitious once when I first got a vice principalship. I was really offended by that because I didn't want it, I really didn't want it. Somebody said to me that I was Richard's [associate superintendent's] protégé and that I was really ambitious. I thought if only you knew the story. I really don't want to be here, this is not what I'm choosing to do at all.*

Amber lives out what she believes about learning. *Education doesn't just happen at school, it doesn't just happen from six to eighteen, it doesn't just happen with a teacher in the room. There are lots of parents and teachers who feel that education happens all of the time and learning happens all of the time. There are a lot of people who want to put it into a box and feel their responsibility is to try and open up those boxes. I think we have to get away from that concept and recognize that learning happens in lots of different places at the same time.*

When we discussed how she sustains herself, Amber mentioned ongoing university summer courses and reading. She also loves to travel. Working closely with teachers and dialoguing with them both personally and by e-mail also nurtures Amber. She recognizes that *I have to sustain myself in a fairly private way, whether it's a course that I'm taking on my own or some writing that I'm doing.*

Amber feels privileged to be a member of the research group because this is something she misses. In her community, she lacks a sense of connection and safety that she feels she needs to affirm her beliefs. Her beliefs are powerful and indicative of the strong spirit she possesses and demonstrates as leader: *I guess I work fairly hard, but only because I love it I just really love it, I do it for the play. I don't even call it work. I don't do it to get somewhere or to get paid something, or to get status after my name, I do it because I really love it.*

Presently Amber has applied for a principalship in a different part of the province. In her words, *I've just applied for another job. It's another balloon and if I don't get it, I really love where I am. I'm torn between the safety and the comfort* *here and the excitement of what's different.* As of this writing, Amber will be moving to a new school closer to home and to her partner.

Introducing Paul

Paul, physically fit and relaxed, began his interview talking about change. He has been the principal of an innovative French Immersion middle/high school of 420 students for the past five years. Paul admits he "*became*" a principal at this school after some mistakes in a previous two-year placement. *I think coming to this school, and being given the opportunity to become who I am today as a principal, has helped me to grow.*

Paul describes himself as a contingency leader, very directed, and very clear on following his vision. *I take the point of view that if people are going to do things that are outside of the proper culture, outside of the vision, then I'm going to consider that to be something I have to work with. At times I'm willing to even play the role of being outraged when I have to.* He is very clear on what his job is as a principal: *It's a people job. Once you've assessed where your people are, their strengths and what motivates them, you have a better opportunity to see where you can take them. And sometimes what you have to do is point out their problems because they're just not going to fit what you're doing and some people have to be told.* Paul describes himself as a person with direction, goals. He had a goal to become an administrator, and he spent a lot of his personal time doing the extras such as coaching to gain experience. When he came to his current school, it was brand new and still unfinished five days before school was to begin. With a great deal of personal commitment and many volunteers, Paul hastily readied the building for students. This became the tempo of his life for the next several years. It wasn't until his son gave him a gift on Father's Day–a handmade sculpture of Paul lying exhausted on the couch–that he realized that he had to make some personal changes. I winced as Paul related this story as there was evidence of a great deal of pain and stress. But the small sculpture became a symbol for Paul and later, for his staff, that family life is first and foremost, and that work is secondary to that. As he puts it, *It's completely different today than it was five years ago. Personally, I think I'm taking better care of my family and I'm finding that I'm having a better time here as well. I think you have to model that for people. There's a lot of principals out there who are workaholics and nobody can aspire to that. I've taken a different tack that I want to model family life as well.*

Paul had another critical turning point in his life when his first child was born. Since then, he has considered his teaching decisions in a different light. *I think that was a big turning point in how I approached teaching again and the individual student. I saw a more humanistic point of view in terms of my teaching.*

Many people in Paul's life have been significant to him. His mother raised him after his alcoholic father left the family when he was thirteen. His mother was a survivor in his eyes and a role model. As the oldest boy, Paul became the protector, responsible for a good part of the raising of his younger siblings. His grandfather, another role model, was also orphaned at an early age and, at sixteen, he was responsible for raising his five siblings. Paul's partner, Karen, was also supportive when he decided to make a change in careers from commerce to education. When Paul decided to apply for administration, his deputy superintendent, "*the gentle giant,*" had a great impact on him. *We had a really good relationship and it still feels* *very comfortable. He helped me see some things that I had to do to get where I wanted to go. His whole philosophy was here's how you help students.*

In learning new things, Paul is similar to others in the group. *Talking to the people is where I usually start. I always start talking to people. I'll call a person because he's really good at doing that or she's really good at this part and that's basically where we go. We amass a little bit of literature but it's got to be good literature. I don't have time to sit there and read everything. I want to hear the good stuff and so that's what we pick and choose from, and from what we hear from other people. But it's a people-oriented thing first.*

To sustain his continued growth, Paul attends professional development sessions and reads widely. He tries to choose issues that parallel the school's direction and his vision for the staff and school. In the future, Paul thinks he might be interested in a district principalship but he is happy as a school leader. *The key word is "success"* and, if he and his family and the school are flourishing, he's satisfied.

Introducing Emily

Emily has been a principal the longest of any member in the group. Known by reputation to several in the group and to others as a mentor and colleague, Emily is caring, thoughtful, and articulate. When Emily talks about her career she mentions that education has provided a lot of opportunities for her. She has been a teacher for twenty-eight years, twenty of them as an administrator. As she puts it: *I don't think I would have ever been someone who would want to do the same job all the time. I don't think I could stay in one place for too long.* Because Emily invites change and always wants to do something different, she has been in many schools and has taught at every level except high school.

Emily grew up an only child, adopted by older parents, and in her words, *probably indulged because I was the center of their universe*. She attributes growing up in this somewhat adult world as contributing to her creativity as she was often alone and thus created different kinds of play situations. Her mother was *the humanist–the person that really modeled caring for others*. Emily describes her father's influence: *I was always willing to try something different. I think it came from that growing experience with my father who was always encouraging me to take that one step, the next step*. Her father lived by the rule "*Nothing ventured, nothing gained*." He was a businessman and a risk-taker, always looking for new ways of doing things.

Looking back at her career, Emily describes how it all began, *When I got into education, I think I really quite stumbled into it in a way. I got into teaching and experienced a lot of success in my first few years. I knew that was what I wanted to do because it gives you an opportunity to make a difference for children. I think I'm someone who wants to make a difference. When I look back I always had that quest that I wanted to provide the very best kind of learning experience that I could and I knew that it wouldn't be just one way. I've always been a learner and I think I've learned most of all that you never ever get there, you just learn something new.*

Emily has strong beliefs about the role of women and much of it she credits to observing her parents in a generation where men worked and women stayed home.

My father was dominant in the sense that he was the breadwinner and lived out the male role. My mother was the homemaker who relied on him for all decisions. This is what made me want to be my own person. I wanted that shared partnership. Her feminist leanings have had an influence on her own family as well. A mother of four, two girls and two boys, Emily admits she can see both sides of herself in her children. *I see some of myself in Eileen, the way she views the world, and yet I see some of the rebellious side of myself in Danielle, because I was fairly rebellious at an early stage.*

When I asked Emily to describe herself, she repeated her strong feelings about working outside the home. The importance of becoming a professional emerged again in this portion of our conversation: *I think I'm someone who gets a lot of satisfaction out of my work and I think that has been a very big part of my life. It's probably all part of our own sense of identity. You can get your sense of identity from your family life. So I think if I describe myself I need to be my own person.*

Many people influenced Emily and the identity she claims. Her roommate at university had a strong faith life that developed in Emily an awareness of her own faith dimension. Another influential person was a colleague who got her moving in a certain direction. As Emily put it, *She's been an important part of my journey because she's been so affirming. If you're struggling with anything, she seems to be there.* Other influences include a former assistant principal, a protégé Emily mentored in the principalship, and a group of friends who gathered regularly to network, the "T-group."

Finally Emily spoke about her husband: *He has always enabled me to pursue my goals, he has never stood in my way and I think he's probably made the greater* *sacrifice really because you know I'm often not there as often as he is. He is the one that went the extra mile.*

Talking about how she learns, Emily explains her approach to learning. With new learning, Emily starts out by doing research and reading materials, or attending a conference. At the next stage, she makes contact with *people I see as gurus in the area, draw on their expertise and keep building, keep expanding that knowledge base based on people who are in practice, people who are noted in the area.*

It's interesting to note the similarity between Emily and Joan with respect to their views of themselves, *I think I'm impatient sometimes and I have very high goals for myself. I know that and I think I like to do well so I'm probably hard on myself. When I don't in my own mind it's not so important what the world thinks as much as what I think. But I've got very high standards for myself.*

Emily believes that it's important to share experiences and to talk through the good as well as the difficult times. *You have to been able to share your vulnerable times as well as your alleluia times and that you can't have one without the other. I talked about that to my staff not too long ago. Everybody wants the alleluia experience but they don't want to talk about the bad times. I said you cannot have one without the other and you have to find the light in the experience.*

In our conversation we turned to significant events in Emily's life that have been turning points. Two stand out for her. The first was writing her personal creed. That embodied for Emily her beliefs and values and set a standard for her professional life. The second turning point was when she as principal began gaining notoriety and a high profile. Much like Amber, Emily felt the pain of the misperceptions of some of her colleagues. *I was really bothered by the fact that when I began to [get a high] profile as a principal that other people resented me for it–professional jealousy. There was a time in my career I didn't like the fact that other people thought I was in it for myself and that bothered me. They thought that the only reason I did anything was so I could have that success. I think we are driven by success but it wasn't to have my name in lights and I knew that within myself. I didn't know how to handle my own success and I thought the way to handle it in the end, so others wouldn't think ill of me, was to just stop sharing.* Several people helped Emily come to grips with this dilemma and one especially assisted by reminding her of the biblical story where we are cautioned not to hide our light under a bushel. *From that moment on I never stopped ever being afraid of getting up and sharing some of the good things that were happening in my life so that others could feel better.*

This struggle of being different, living on the margins, Emily mentioned over and over in our conversation and again it repeats itself. *I could have just as easily said "Okay, I'll just become a status quo principal, I won't do anything that makes me look any different from anybody else and then I won't have people talking about me." But I think I've always liked being on the edges.* She relates a story from her former school. The school was opened approximately three years previous to Emily's arrival as principal. *I learned from that experience that it doesn't matter how skilled you are or how much you are on the cutting edge, you may go into a situation where it's just not working, for whatever reason. I was glad that I had that experience, a very positive experience for me. I wouldn't have wished it on myself but I learned so much from it.*

As a principal Emily has a reputation for hard work and change. *You know, as a principal, people always really loved working with me or they hated it. I've had both extremes. I always seem to have the extremes and I think the reason for that is because when you are on those margins, you're in a certain place in your thinking, whether it's curriculum or kids, whatever. People who tend to have similar kinds of values are drawn to you and want to learn with you and grow. Those who are very far removed from that space are really not comfortable. I think it's way easier if you're status quo, in the middle, that person that runs the middle line and draws both edges in. But I think when you're pushing a little harder on that edge, not everybody is comfortable with you.*

Her reflections on living on the edge are insightful. *It takes a lot of courage to be successful, especially if you believe that the gifts and strengths you've been given need to be shared with others who ask for it. I think that all of our talents are kind of God-given and I feel a responsibility. It's like giving something back to the profession. I've always had that belief. You want to be a learner but you also want to be a teacher.*

The issue of finding a balance was a struggle Emily shared with her colleagues in the group. It seems for nearly every principal in the group this is a reality. There is too much work but, in every case, her comments on the amount of work are prefaced with remarks about how much she loves her work: *I think all my life I've had trouble with balance. I mean you make an effort at it but the point of the matter is that I love what I do. And so the balance, it's hard for me, out of whack. I work at it.*

Emily finished her conversation with me by relating a story of another significant experience. While it was not new to me, the focus of the story underlines the importance of attending to the sub-texts of people's lives. Emily shares it this way: *It's a story about a gentleman named Ron who came to a leadership academy and was a very difficult person to work with, had quite an exterior to him. I had made a judgment call on his abilities as a leader based on the surface of things. It was through that opportunity to be with him for a week and recognize the depth of the man, and it was through the support system of the group, that I really learned something from that experience. You know, so often, we quickly judge.*

Emily reflects with grace and poise on the years she has been an administrator. She has many stories to tell and often prefaces her remarks with one of these stories. On a daily basis Emily lives out her beliefs about children and caring for people. Her conversation with me highlighted for me, the caring committed educator she is.

Introducing Michael

I began my conversation with Michael one afternoon in a cafe not far from his school. He was still flying high from a busy day in his inner city school of 155 students and the evening lay ahead with a school council meeting. Michael and I have known each other for some years and, previous to his principalship, we had worked together on several projects. Michael, a father of two with strong beliefs about his work as an educator and a parent, is youthful, and has a European flair about him. We started our conversation with a question about significant events in his life that may have affected his view of the world. His answer echoed the sentiments of several people in the group. Michael commented that the birth of his children was the most important milestone for him personally and professionally. As he puts it, *I think the birth of my children was a very, very important part of my development both as a human being, evolving and changing, and as an educator. It made me a better educator as I could see things not only from a teacher's perspective but also from a parental perspective.*

A second milestone for Michael occurred when he attended graduate school. This opened many avenues and different ways of thinking for him and there was a big jump in *my learning curve in terms of administration and working with people, learning more about curriculum, learning more about administration and the synergy of working with people.* While graduate school was a very successful time for Michael, his application for administration and attempts at the principalship were not. *I'm not begrudging the experience that I went through but it wasn't affirming. I felt what do I have to do to prove that that I'm good enough? I felt I was going through hoops and it was a good experience but at the time I don't believe I was bitter but I was. I'd be interested in connecting with other people who've have sort of the same experience that I've had, whose journey toward the principalship was not that affirming. It was a kind of situation that was unfortunate but I have a positive attitude, so I don't reflect on that.*

Michael struggled to achieve the principalship and prove to others that he was worthy of the work. He spent a great deal of time preparing a professional portfolio and analyzing himself for areas of improvement. After this experience with senior administration over his appointment to the role, Michael did a great deal of soul-searching: *And I had to have those desert experiences. I had to make them work whether I wanted to or not. I remember sitting down, making a list of things to do to make this work: putting my people skills into place, putting my organizational skills into place, listing what I need to do.*

His positive attitude comes from an unfailing faith and a will to be successful. As Michael puts it, *I would describe myself as very energetic and enthusiastic towards not just my profession but toward life. I also see myself as a positive individual and I think, in life, sometimes you can choose to be negative. I choose to be positive and that personal choice is an attitude that makes the difference. If you see things from a positive perspective, you can look at what you're going to learn from it, how you're going to be able to better yourself in a situation. So I choose to be positive in what I do and that, in my work and also with my own personal life.*

Michael has struggled with several difficult issues on his journey to the principalship. He tells one of those stories: *I learned you have to stand up for what is right and that I believe part of our Christian Catholic belief is that we stand up for justice. I remember the very beginning of my second year as an assistant principal, I had a young fellow in my room. I'll never forget him his name–Danny, a special needs child, who had come out of a positive development classroom. We could not lay a finger on this young man. I remember briefing the staff, that this is the child's special need. If there's a problem, I'd tell them, please see me. One staff member didn't and Danny was very upset. There was a big scene and the staff member assaulted me in the staff room. He picked me up–he was a very large man–and threw me across the room. He was so upset with me because I would not expel this child. I* *had to stand on what I believed was right, what I believed was for the best interests of children and it was hard, it was unbelievable. They say that the strongest trees don't grow on the mountaintop, they grow deep in the valley and that was a valley, that particular day. I had to stand up for what was right, what I believed was right for children. It just shaped me so much as an administrator. Yes, you need to be compassionate, and you need to be caring but the students are the first people in your care. Staff is very important, I'm not saying they're not, but the first on the list are the children that I teach and the children that are in my school. That experience really shaped me because of what it did to my belief statements. When I wrote my belief statements for the principalship: I believe in the courage to support children–that was the key.*

Michael credits several persons with influencing him in his life. From his parents, who were Italian immigrants to Canada in the 1940s, Michael learned the importance of a good work ethic. *I really learned strongly from my parents, the value of education, that in order to break away from the immigrant cycle, education will get you out of it.* One of his first principals was a great influence. She taught him many things but, in particular, *she was a very, very strong influence on my life in terms of seeing things through the eyes of children. As a beginning educator you need someone who is child-centered to say, "Now look at this from the children's perspective." I still reflect back to those days, and think what am I doing to kids and what subtle message am I giving children?*

Michael also talked about his learning experiences as a teacher effectiveness consultant. During this time, Michael honed his skills as a public speaker and developed his communication skills more thoroughly. *I think it really prepared me immensely for the job as principal, where you must speak to parent groups, especially in the inner city; where you must be able to converse with social services agencies, government, with foster parents, with everyone under the sun. You need to be able to have your wits about you and to be able to get up and speak, without feeling shy or timid.*

Finally Michael returns to his graduate work experience as a great opportunity for him to learn and grow. It was a time where he gained many ideas from other practicing principals and spent valuable time deconstructing issues and learning from them. *I think I really appreciate the people who I worked with when I did my graduate work. They really influenced me in terms of working collaboratively with others, being able to be in spirit, in unison with other people and being able to share what goes right in the class sometimes, what goes wrong and what to do about it.* For Michael, graduate school was an important milestone in his development as an administrator.

Learning for Michael is continuous so when I asked him about how he approaches new learning he was very clear: *I think, first, I need to put things into perspective for myself. I like to gather opinions and input but I also don't want to totally rely on other people's experiences. I have to be able to rely on my own experiences, my own decision-making power. I like to listen to what other people have to say. I put things into chewable pieces, one little step at a time, to be able to put something together. Being a visual learner, I sometimes have to write it down for myself in little chunks. At the end I rely on myself in terms of "All right, this is what*

I've learned from others, this is how I see it fitting in, and this is how I'm going to use it."

As with almost all others in the research group, Michael struggles with the inevitable issue of balancing a heavy workload and a young family. In his first experience as an assistant principal, Michael worked with a very dedicated and hard-working principal. The man was single and school was his life. He spent long hours there and often worked late at night and weekends. This set a difficult pace for Michael. As he puts it: *My job is important to me but I don't feel I should be there for fifteen hours a day. That was a really important learning experience, to work hard but also to play hard, and to put my whole life in balance. I learned from his long hours to make boundaries for myself.* Since then, as a principal, Michael has learned to try to keep his work within limits of reason. Working in the inner city has put an added stress on this for him as there are many meetings outside of school hours. However, Michael has placed his family and personal life on a level with his work life and he works hard to maintain the balance.

Michael also tells the story about going to work in a non-collaborative school environment. He was assigned to a school where staff had been teaching for upwards of twenty years. Michael was the young, new assistant principal and the principal had many older confidantes on staff. *Certain individuals were his confidantes that he went to, to work out school problems and they ended up knowing things before I did. So it was a very difficult situation. The confidantes had the power and everyone knew it. If they went to him for something it happened right away. It wasn't very positive and going through it was very difficult. If you know an Indian story, Knots in the*

Counting Rope, *it talks about every knot as an important milestone, so I think that's a knot in my professional story.* When I pursued with Michael what that incident had taught him he was adamant about its importance: *I had never really thought about the people in the school who had the power. That sometimes it's not the principal, it could be a very strong group of teachers or support staff. Because the people who have the power were the people who were comfortable in their church pews and did not want to make any changes in their lives for the children's best interest, or their personal growth. They were not willing to make any compromise. That's where I had to learn the power of diplomacy, working with them and being positive and also being honest. You know, sometimes I couldn't sugarcoat things, I had to say what I had to say.*

When Michael and I discussed what he does to sustain his learning he talked a lot about reading and talking with others. *I take every opportunity to read professionally. I think that is really important. I also find that working with different people, getting ideas, dialoguing about the job that you do, is valuable. I love to visit people and their work place. I find that that really helps me to learn the way to handle different situations and different crises that happen in school. Just visiting other schools and other work places influences me, it actually motivates me.*

Michael finished our conversation by quoting a phrase he has used in his portfolio since he was a beginning teacher. *"Learning is a journey of new beginnings, let the journey begin." If you see learning as a journey and that journey takes you to different places, sometimes places you don't want to be but you make the best of it. It's a journey, and what you have learned from the journey and how you can make the* *best of that situation and use it in other parts of your life is education, never ending. You learn in your personal life, you learn in your professional life, you learn just driving down the street when somebody cuts you off and you've got to put your foot on the brake. Learning doesn't stop till the day you die and who knows after that.* For Michael, work as a principal is still full of suspense and learning. He is still trying out ideas and learning on the job. In his second year as a principal, Michael has much to offer in terms of seeing issues in a fresh way. His voice is not yet fully developed but every day he continues to learn and grow. In Michael's own words: *I sometimes reflect on people and the way they live their lives and what stories they can teach us, from their experiences, because experiences is a big teacher, really big teacher. I want to be remembered as someone who had the courage to fight for what was right for children, for the students in my care and for the communities.*

Introducing Helen

Helen, tall, with smiling eyes, is the principal of an elementary school of 300 students in a well-to-do community. She is also married to a principal and has two school-age children. Helen is interested in education as much for her students as she is for her children. When asked why she works as a principal, Helen responded: *The reason I do it is because I too work with a group of people that I find really challenging and that helps me grow. But also I do it for my kids, because I believe that I'm committed to public education, and I want to do what I can, because they are in that system.*

We began to converse about how she sees herself at the moment. *I would say [I am] just really a searcher and a seeker in terms of relationships and how they are* *developing on a personal level. Seeing how my kids are growing and how I'm developing those relationships and what a good parent would do rather than what a teacher would do* are all issues that hold Helen's attention. Similar to others in the group, being a parent and a teacher is significant for Helen. As she puts it: *I find it really difficult to be a teacher and a parent in that I have really high expectations for myself and for what a school should be for children. Hopefully I can help other people to set those expectations for themselves so that we can make good schools for all kids. And that's exactly what I expect for my children. I'm a player on the periphery there and that has caused tension. I would like to get in there [her children's' schools] and say "Well, here's another way we could look at having the parents and the teachers..." But I have to take a different tack. I'd like to bring my kids here [her school] because I know what the situation would be for them. I know what they would get. I know how it would be delivered. But I also believe in the community school and being with friends–that's a really important thing.*

The tension around this issue emerges again as we discuss the tug-of-war that Helen experiences with her work and her family. Questions between Helen and her children: "*Are you going be home early today?* or *Why don't you come to school with me like other mom's do?"* are difficult for her to answer. *My kids are saying "We love you and we'd like you to be around us more." That becomes an issue for me to really think about because I believe so much in good education for kids that I need to do this job. And so I talk to them about that but I also take my personal days to be a helper [at their school].*

In her growing up years, Helen experienced a lot of encouragement. While her father quietly encouraged her, Helen's mother offered choices and alternatives. The onus was often on Helen to choose what to do and how to do it. There wasn't an overbearing feeling of failure–you were just expected to do your best. Helen describes those experiences this way: *My father was very low key, just the nodding of the head, "Good, keep going" and then my mom was more effervescent–"Oh, we can do this and this!" So I think of the term really encouraging, almost the idea that you can do no wrong. And with that attitude, you weren't afraid to fail.* Being raised in that environment has shaped Helen into an experimenter, a seeker. It has been her trademark and sometimes her curse. Often, when she is willing to try new ideas and approaches, others aren't so willing. *That's probably where some of the friction, some of the discomfort, may come from. Because when you do give people choices and support to make them and when they do start to carry out their choice, and you support their action, it's still hard if they haven't had that experience because they think there may be a hidden agenda. I really do have a plan that I would like them to do and I do have expectations. I have my own plans too. But I also have finally learned that my plans can even become better when I incorporate other's. So I know the expectations will be met but it may just take a different route.*

Helen was the first in her family to go to university. This made her family very proud and many sacrifices were made so that Helen could attend. Her father's pride was evident to Helen and to this day she believes *I think I was living a dream for other people.* As well as feeling loved and supported by her family, Helen believes there were many teachers who helped her to weave the tapestry of her self. *I* *had some really fine teachers that gave little snippets, little pieces of the patchwork quilt that just pulled together and made it the route I would follow and continue.*

When Helen talked about people or events that have had an influence on her, her first comment is of her husband. *I would definitely say Ken. I think that having us both in the same careers is really helpful because we are mentors for each other. We have a twenty-four hour mentorship going. It could drive you nuts sometimes! And sometimes we say we're not talking school at the table but you also sometimes have this huge need to debrief or vent for two minutes and then get on with life.* Other people who affected Helen in different ways include her colleagues from a central office position when she acted as a consultant in language learning. This was an *incredibly energizing time in my career. It was constant PD [professional development] for myself as well as working with teachers providing the PD, so I just bloomed. It was very eclectic, and it was really exciting when I went back to university.* At the university, an Elementary Education professor helped Helen to slow down and examine her story so she might write about it. Helen completed her Masters in Education and wrote a thesis on the topic of women's conversations in administration.

The struggle for balance is also a burning issue for Helen. She tells this story of trying to find a balance in her early years as a principal: *I can remember Andy [my oldest son] calling. Andy asked "Are you coming home for supper?" And I said "Yeah, just tell dad that I'm almost done." I heard Ken in the background saying "Tell Mommy, it's never done." Andy replied "Mommy, it's never done. So come home now." So you need to start making some of those choices.* The on-going balancing act for principals is a theme that is repeated in these stories. However, it is most obvious in the words of principals with young children.

We moved in the conversation to the area of learning new things for the first time. I asked Helen to describe how she goes about learning something new. *Usually what happens is that I hear some speaker who starts the juices flowing. I think "I'd like to know more about this." I politely pester the speaker after the session asking where the article is from, or from what book, and so on. And then I go through those books and have the pile to read. But I find talking or phoning someone and asking where I can get more information is helpful. So I usually go to the people first and then to the print. But I find talking to the people first the most successful form for me.*

When we talked about significant events that have made a difference in Helen's school story she told of a recent incident that indicated how supportive parents are of her work and the work she has done in the school with the staff and students. *The parents said "Helen, we trust you and we trust what you and the staff will do together." I believe that we have a diamond, we're not going to re-cut it, we're just going to shine it up. It was great to share this with staff. I said "We just had an a huge solidarity movement from our parents saying they're with us." The trust was the big thing.* This was an inspiring moment for Helen who came from a very successful school to the present school which has been divided over issues related to special programs and high marks. She feels that she and the staff have made an impact on the school community but acknowledges that it took four years to evolve.

When Helen and I spoke about her future she demurred. In her estimation, she always wanted to be a teacher and had few other career aspirations. She still sees herself as a teacher first, a principal after that. She has never been very successful at planning ahead or tracking her career because she likes to leave herself open to opportunities: *My fear is I'll miss out on something if I track myself. Then I have missed out and you want it all to try it all, like the buffet or whatever. If I'm doing that, what will I miss? So you get–like bumper cars–you get bumped along and you still make some choices.* As for the future Helen is adamant about keeping life in balance as much to be able to perform at her work as to be a good role model for children. *I know for sure that I am going to work on my personal health and wellbeing because, if not, I'm not going to be able to do anything with my family.*

We came to the end of conversation discussing how Helen sustains herself and keeps up with change. *There is so much change right now just within our district. All you have to do is walk out of your school and attend two meetings and you've got enough change on your plate. So I certainly am not worried about staying in or getting into a rut. But then my rut might be just the constant buzzing around!*

From a principal's perspective, change like this is almost debilitating because it is too fast. *It's interesting when the changes come in, I look at them and I ask which ones do I need to share and talk about with staff and which ones I don't. So I try to filter all that and then just keep abreast of it.*

In response to my quotation from Mary Catherine Bateson, "*Education, whether for success or failure, is never finished,*" Helen commented: *It is constant and I think that's the life-giving thing of it. I just find teaching, or education, infused* *with so much that will keep me going. It is a life force for me and that's why I haven't changed careers. I've been in school all my life, since I was six years old.*

Our conversation ended with Helen's remarks about her sense of inadequacy when talking about work as a principal. She believes that many people create a story: *I'd rather say "these teachers" or "we," or "the students," because I don't believe it's one person. That's almost the antithesis of what I'm trying to achieve. We're always seeking to do better and looking for something and we'll get there. But then, when we're there, we're going on somewhere else. So it is never done which I think is exciting but it also can be hard. You never get time to say "good job" and you do need to do that.*

Linking Personal Stories

These personal stories shed some light on the group members and their individual beliefs and values. Through stories, we can often become "acquainted". While each person expressed his or her story somewhat differently, there are several links that weave the stories together.

In reading and listening to these people, I was intrigued by the importance for each of their family, especially the complexity and intricacy of the "web of relations" (Arendt, 1958). In this group, families, both of their origin and their own, made a significant mark. In every case, the importance of parental encouragement and support or lack thereof was noted. There was great candor on the part of group members when they spoke of being abandoned by a parent or having to help raise siblings because one parent was unable. These events remain critical to this group of adults even now and have shaped their views of the world considerably. Their experiences in childhood are clearly related to the ways they are raising their children.

Similarly, every person in the group remarked in some fashion on the effects of their work as a principal on their families and how raising a family has changed their perspective as a principal. One participant, who has no children of her own, commented humorously: *I can't imagine having my own children because I would be arrested for neglect.* This theme was repeated in several ways and is obviously a concern to principals. Several noted that their partners had assumed most of the work on the home front, *I think he [her husband] probably made the greater sacrifice really because you know I'm often not there as often as he is. He is the one that went the extra mile.*

On the other hand, raising children has had a significant effect on most of these principals. Concern for their children's education has heightened their awareness of the importance of the decisions they make daily in schools. As Helen put it: *I do it for my kids, because I believe that I'm committed to public education, and I want to do what I can do for it, because they are in that system.*

The motivating factor that enables these principals was another common link. Every principal in the group appeared to love their work and love the people with whom they work:

> *I guess I love what I do.*
>
> *I work with a group of people that I find really challenging and [who] help me to grow.*
>
> *This year my job is magical, just magical.*

> *I'm in a school where I'm very proud of the staff and I look forward to being with them.*

> *I really enjoy being a principal. I just love it.*

were some of the statements made by the principals in the group.

Finding a balance between work and the rest of life also was a predominant theme. The struggle to find a balance in a busy life was an overbearing need for these principals. To carve out and secure personal time was an ongoing task. Currently, as the position is given more and more responsibility, principals are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain a life beyond school. Most spoke of attempts to bring balance back into their lives, and the question of their wellness. As Helen put it: *I see myself guarding my time and my personal life with family. My personal life has gone by the wayside. The saying "Never confuse having a career with having a life," is fitting. I try not to confuse that. Even though I find my career exciting and very life giving, it also takes from life. And there's no such thing as balance. I just have to keep weaving.*

And finally, participating in a professional development support network was a critical issue. The development of our small community seemed to be a positive step in this direction. Several people mentioned the importance of getting together away from their schools to converse with peers. *I'm really happy to be here and I see our group as professional development for me."* Another principal said it this way, *I'm really interested to know what other people are feeling about what it is they think a principal does or they think I am doing.* Finally, *I find the conversations for me, those are my PDs, those intense conversations.*

There may be other common threads in the personal stories of members of the group but these were most evident to me. We move next to the group's collective story, the stories of these principals and their work in schools to enable professional development. These stories were compiled over a period of twelve months as the group met and engaged in conversations. Narratives of relationships, successful and disappointing, open our collective story. Subsequently, the group story moves through experiences of growth and the principals' perceptions of their successes and betrayals. Finally, we will tell the story of one principal's journey with a teacher in professional development. The collective story begins in another room in February 1997.

Chapter Two

The Web of Human Relations

In a room much like the first. An early spring thaw has swept the snow-covered streets and houses. An unceremonious drip from a leaking rooftile interrupts my thinking. Will it record on the tape? The air in the room is sweet even after closed windows and forced heat all winter. People come in exclaiming, " The roads are filled with water! There's mud everywhere! It's so warm I didn't need a coat!" Smiling faces, cordial greetings, and genuine expressions of delight to be together once again. In time, the nine principals, munching on carrot sticks and cookies have positioned themselves around a large table.

What's the plan for today? someone asks. A quotation to start the session. Everyone listens as Margaret picks up her copy of Maxine Greene's Releasing the Imagination (*1995)* and reads the following passage:

> *I hope we can ponder the opening of wider and wider spaces of dialogue in which diverse students and teachers, empowered to speak in their own voices, reflect together as they try to bring into being and in between. Not only may they weave what Hannah Arendt calls a web of relations among themselves as embodied consciousnesses; they may through their coming together constitute a newly human world, one worthy enough and responsive enough to be both durable and open to continual renewal. Of course, this has to begin in local places—in schoolrooms and schoolyards and neighbourhood centres [teacher centres and rooms like this]. It has to begin where people know each other's names. It can radiate to inform the conversation and to empower the individuals to open themselves to what they are making in common. Once they are open, once they are informed, once they are engaged in speech and action from their many vantage points, they may be able to identify a better state of things and go on to transform. Sometimes I believe it is our only hope (p. 59).*

There is a muted silence at the end of the reading. This piece of writing, a beautiful account, spoke to each of us about the many places we have traveled and perhaps wished to travel in our conversations as principals. However, the boundary lines that exist between our staff and ourselves, our selves and our role, have often confined and restrained us. In their recent work, *Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes (1995),* Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin pictured it this way:

> [As a teacher, I]...live in two different professional places. One is the relational world inside the classroom where I co-construct meaning with my students. The other is the abstract world where I live with everyone outside my classroom, a world where I meet all the other aspects of the educational enterprise such as the philosophies, the techniques, the materials, and the expectations that I will enact certain educational practices. While each of these places is distinctive, neither is totally self-contained. Together these places form the professional knowledge landscape that frames my work as an educator (p. 16).

The story lines in the conversations that follow cross over the boundaries of these domains. As principals, we were struggling, in our stories, to build an atmosphere of trust and acceptance–a relational world–while still continuing to support the abstract world of enabling and promoting growth in our staff. We began our second session together by trying to gain a better understanding of how we make meaning of the metaphoric phrase "web of human relations" (Arendt, 1958). How are relationships viewed in a school? Are there conditions that improve or set back relationships? Are all relationships rewarding? When do relationships disappoint us? Can we be a friend and a principal at the same time? In some of our stories, the boundary lines between the relational world and the theoretical world became blurred and less evident whereas, in others, they were more heavily pronounced.

Narrative as Democratic Research

By collectively beginning to unravel the questions we had, we acknowledged that the borders between researcher and researched are indistinct and even hazy. In the process of participants becoming researchers and the researcher a participant, our voices often joined and blended together. Typically, in qualitative research methodology, the researcher tries to listen first to the practitioners' stories. However, in our research effort, we tried telling and responding to one another's stories concurrently so that we could reflect a sincere effort to listen to all the participants. Thus, our shared story began to evolve with all our voices enacting it. And, in this meeting, the similarity of our experiences, as our stories unfolded, resonated for each of us. Because we were able to expand on and extend one another's stories by adding our own experiences and reflections, the story became richer and more meaningful for us. As "person [s] engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4), we contemplated, collectively, those stories where we had commonplaces. Like a group of explorers, we struggled to assist and ease each other's journey. This phenomenon commented on by Wasser and Bresler (1996) in "*Working in the Interpretive Zone,*" demonstrated how our presence and interactions extended and elaborated on the original thinking of each of us. Because there was no one researcher, we offered multiple understandings.

By sharing our own stories, and remaining open to the variety and eloquence of others' stories, we pursued a narrative reflection on practice which Schon (1983) discussed as critical to educational development. Our conversations were marked by a feeling of equality and flexibility that allowed each of us to establish freely the form we were comfortable with and to share the content of our experiences (Oakley, 1981). We gathered together for this project in a climate of respect, mutual trust, and caring that was respectful of one another. As a result, good conversation, highlighting the importance of partners over topic was evident and a pledge to learning and exploring was encouraged. In our conversations, we, as researchers and researched, learned trust, confidence, and the critical importance of the relationship in human interactions (Noddings, 1984).

In choosing to story our experiences as principals and in an effort to understand how we might enable the professional growth of teachers, we focused on the taken-for-grantedness of our roles. In considering how the image of our roles might be transformed, and in order to reveal the challenges, tensions, and the hopes the transformation could inspire, the complexities of the work had to be uncovered. We were in agreement that the old text of teacher evaluation and professional development, based on a bureaucratic deficit model, was in need of revision. Its one-dimensional, single perspective stories told in a distant, authoritative language of expertise no longer represented our understanding of the multiple realities of today's knowledge-based era. However, deconstructing the myth that authoritative, rigid practices serve to teach and promote learning was risky. What if we could find no better alternatives? What if there were no words to express what we wanted to say? What if the former landscape, upon careful scrutiny, was preferred?

Finding the appropriate words to describe some of the new realities–personal growth, communities of learners, webs of relationships, unique voices–was not nearly the challenge we predicted it might be. However, leaving the former landscape, was another issue. Personal pain, loneliness, and vulnerability brought on by trying to foster change made returning to this place seem attractive at times. Existing political structures defaulted many of our change actions. We acknowledged that we were, even in the discussion, venturing onto new ground. However, by openly discussing our successes and failures in facilitating teacher growth, fostering relationships, and modeling leadership, we began to share a sense of safety and risk-taking. In our own collaborative way, we modeled how, by slowly uncovering our stories, we might begin to transform our day-to-day actions. We learned from each other's successes and failures. Does every story have a happy ending? Yes and no. There are, as in all stories, moments of great joy and of sadness and disappointment. But, perhaps more importantly, our efforts of coming together, listening attentively, and responding to each other's stories created in us a stronger, more meaningful connection to one another and fostered our growth as a knowledge community.

Stories of Relationship

Communities based on webs of relationships and networks rather than hierarchies are characterized by several common attributes (Lambert et al., 1995). One is that the prevalence of relationships encourages communication patterns that bring information to everybody and all persons participate in the sharing of knowledge and information. A second characteristic describes the kind of leader this community requires. That person is a leader who engages people in reciprocal processes, the give and take of respectful and sustained conversations that ensure that all participants in the conversation bring information and discovery to it. A third characteristic of communities with webbed relationships is that they are notably absent of "experts." No one claims to be better or brighter or the boss, thereby eliminating the "cult of expertise" (Lambert et al.). All persons have strengths and shortcomings that the whole community honors and supports.

In our conversations it was apparent that the cult of expertise continued to be an issue, even in schools where principals have attempted to provide multiple opportunities for equitable, professional relationships. These efforts were sometimes subverted by former or prevailing power structures that remain misunderstood. In the telling of our stories you may also recognize the problem-solving efforts of principals to foster open, equitable, reciprocal communication patterns with their staff as well as the limits that hinder participation. Finally, the intentional development of a webbed relationship community meant forging new paths and going out on emotional and practice "limbs." The vulnerability and loneliness of some of these intentions can be found in the words and in the conversations ahead.

Weaving the Web

> *Hannah Arendt, in a beautiful account of weaving a "web of human relationships"(1958, p.183), describes how people's action and speech is often primarily concerned with their worldly and objective interests. These interests—the planning of a meeting, the setting up of a group for people with AIDS, the launching of a basic literacy program—*

> *lie between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most of our action and speech has to do with this kind of in-between, and thus most of our words and deeds are about worldly reality—grocery lists, car repairs, business profits, university admissions, shared religions—in addition to being disclosures of the acting/speaking agents involved.*
>
> *"But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real in the world of things we visible have in common. We call this reality the web of human relationships, indicating by the metaphor its intangible quality" (1958, p.183). Her idea that we disclose ourselves as subjects, as unique and distinct persons when we come together, seems to me to be of utmost importance, so important that we must find ways of integrating it into our notions of community and collaborative action. (Greene, 1995, p. 70)*

As our first collective story–"The Web of Human Relationships"–unfolded, Connelly's and Clandinin's (1990) words, "A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (p. 4) resonated for the members of our research group. Teresa began venturing out on the relationship landscape with these words: *I think one of my learnings has been that relationships are at the core. I've often given it the same analogy as a marriage. If the parents' relationship is healthy, usually the kids are healthy. I find that if relationships between the principal and the staff are healthy, and the staff with each other, the staff with the parents, it seems to unfold. But it seems to unfold from the relationship of the staff and the principal. Somehow, to me, it seems that those other relationships unfold after that. And, I think, part of it has to be trust, and there has to be openness. Once you cultivate the climate of trust and openness, I think that does free people. That it is the starting point.* This beginning statement reflects not only the openness and candor that the participants engaged in throughout the study but, also, the importance that the members of the group attached to relationships. For them, trust was clearly a critical ingredient. Another participant, Michael, added to Teresa's beginning: *If you really want kids to learn something, to really change the way that they've approached something or to really open their minds, you can't do it unless the majority of the group really trusts that you are not going to abuse them, hurt them or treat them badly. I don't think it's any different with staff. It doesn't take much with an adult, just a word or two, and you can destroy a person. I think when we're working with teachers, if you're getting people to really examine some of these very hard questions, tough questions, you can't do it unless there's a relationship of trust.*

For everyone seated around that table, relationship was central. Different people viewed it in unique and different ways. Bob's perception went beyond relationship, in his opinion: *The issue for me is one of love. It goes beyond even the relationship. It goes to a parent-child love relationship. When you deal with your staff the same way you would with your own class as a teacher, you develop a love relationship. You have to be positively parenting. That is, you do everything you can to make their job easier, but you have to say "no" when it's appropriate, and you have to draw the line when it's inappropriate. Positive relationship is a good way to describe it, but love is a better way.* Teresa elaborated and extended Bob's contribution: *Because it's [parental love] unconditional, I find, if something goes wrong, you have to speak to a staff member about a delicate issue. I always take the role of normalising that relationship the next day, making sure I drop by to say hello, or "Your kids did a good job in this." However, showing you care too much can be a danger and a threat especially to parents.* Joan shared this story: *I got slapped once for loving people. That was hard. It took me a long time not to use the word again,* *because I said it to a large group of parents. A couple of parents didn't like it [the comment] and responded: "How dare you? They're our kids. We love them, and we're their parents." The parents felt I was being presumptuous. So I had some time where I was unsure about most of my relationships in my work.* The line between caring enough and caring too little is a precarious balance for teachers and principals. For persons gathered in this group, the corner posts of a relationship, trust and caring, are maintained with foresight and some reservation.

The Cult of Expertise

Trying to begin and sustain an equitable, professional conversation is often difficult. Teachers are accustomed to principals having the power in relationships. As Helen put it: *I really do think, as the principal, it is hard to have those same caring relationships, because you are, number one, evaluating, and I think that really gets in the way. And some people see you as the boss.* The "boss," a ubiquitous term, is heard in schools far too often and in ways that are often unjust and uncomplimentary. Years of hierarchical relationships have left a legacy that is slowly being dismantled by principals who believe that working with people as opposed to working over them is preferable. However, teachers and principals are struggling with letting go the old versions of the school's power structure. Helen continued: *I think the idea of community of learners is that we acknowledge that some of us have different strengths in different areas and different contributions we can make at different times. One of the hardest things that I've coped with is just being willing to admit that I don't know or I don't have a skill in that area. Yet, I think that has been a very freeing thing for staff, because it has given them freedom to not know everything in all areas* *too. It's created a greater climate of learning among staff. So I think that's a change in relationship too. It takes you from that power position or that B-word position. I don't feel much like a boss person.*

Breaking set with old assumptions (Lambert et al., 1995) and discovering new words to describe a different landscape is a challenge. Margaret described it this way: *In a webbed relationship model, the leader drops out of the leadership, out of the sort of B [boss] role, out of the ego-needs role. I think as a principal that you have to have a strong ego, but not a big one. If you can have a strong ego and say, "We're all okay, I don't have to be in charge here," then I think you can start to move in those directions–in that "breaking set" direction. Sometimes trying to break set and make change is viewed in a negative way.* Another story followed as Emily explained a situation that occurred on her staff last year: *Someone on staff had mentioned to me in passing that "Last year there was an inner circle." It wasn't a criticism of the principal, but it was a comment, and I thought, sometimes the staff sees something that's put together for a very good reason, as an inner circle. So, in talking about relationships that we set up as an opportunity, sometimes people misunderstand it. It depends on your staff and how they perceive it.*

Perceptions of Relationships

How do others view our relationships as principals? Because often perceptions are inaccurate, we felt compelled to address how our relationships with staff are perceived. Can principals meet with a group of people informally without it being seen as a special event? How do we include all staff, without marginalizing certain people so that others are included? Does every group with whom the principal meets have to be sanctioned? The conversations proceeded rapidly. In Joan's words: *What is it that I'm doing or what is happening here that people are perceiving this to be a privilege, that some people are marginalized and some people are privileged?' And a concern for me as a principal is that all of a sudden because I'm the principal, it's privileged information.* Emily added her thoughts to the conversation: *Because most times it's somebody else's perception of the relationship. It might not even be something you're consciously thinking about in those terms, but all of a sudden somebody puts that kind of umbrella on it.* Joan joined the conversation by telling a story about her daily walks with certain staff members. *My joy is to walk [exercise] with two staff members and it feels good to do that in the morning. I wasn't going to second-guess how people thought or felt about it. I would be open as much as I could.* Joan recognised how this action might be perceived by staff and dealt with it openly in the school. Michael, a new principal, admitted to his discomfort with this idea. He added: *I don't know if I'd want to be with my staff on personal time doing something daily with them. I'd be concerned about how the rest [of the staff] would perceive that. I'm even conscious that I don't sit next to the same staff member all the time.* This concern for how our actions are perceived was felt by nearly everyone around the table. It is not always easy to understand and is often dependent on the relations between you as principal and the staff in the school. Your transparency as leader and your successful implementation of shared meaning and values will have an influence. As Emily put it: *Perhaps it depends on how long a staff has been together and their comfort levels with each other.* From the perspective of professional knowledge landscapes, this may be an example of how boundaries blur yet understanding of the blurring isn't held by all. Lambert et al. might add that by making your actions open and declarative to all and acting as peer participants, tolerance and understanding could be increased.

Meaning Making through Relationships

Lieberman (1994), in her discussions about relationships in collaborative work, has frequently reflected on the criticalness of human interaction and the emergence of professionalism. In her words, "Patterns of relationships in schools are the visible manifestation of meaning making. Their absence contributes to fragmentation in the lives of children and adults. Facilitating the creation of patterns of relationships in school is an act of leadership" (p. 57). Emily commented on her role as principal in the creation of a facilitating process: *I think administrators want the relationships on a staff to be really good. You find that you worry about it. You look out there and you see little pockets of things happening. We always want it to be really good. You want everybody to get along and support one another.* Teresa added her thoughts: *I find so often as the principal you really do have to take the higher road, no matter how awful you're feeling or how difficult it is.* Emily: *You're modeling.* Teresa: *With the staff, or with the parent community in general, when people call. No matter what they say, I sometimes have to force myself to say, "Thank you for calling."* In conclusion, and with humour, Emily had the last word: *As we say, thank you. Thank you for sharing that!*

The group of principals gathered around the table commonly held that fostering relationships was critical in their role. Margaret shared from her last school experience: *It really struck me, how oddly teachers looked at me, when I tried to model a different kind of relationship, a more peer-related relationship, with them. It* *took a long time, probably the first two years in the school, to get a sense of trust. No matter what I said and did, the issue at the core of it [fostering change] was the relationship that we had built together. Before anything else got done, that relationship had to be in place. And what struck me when I left the school, was that if I hadn't actually worked on those relationships, not just with teachers, but with kids and the parents, I don't think I would have made any progress.* Emily added her thoughts on the matter: *I was thinking while you were talking, that it is hard. As a principal you work hard to bring things together. But it's true, you never have that same connection to the staff as the staff has to each other.* Teresa joined in: *I think part of it has to be trust. I know it's not the same relationship as the staff has with each other, but I think there has to be openness. And once you cultivate the climate of trust and openness, I think that does free people.*

Stories and Schools

The direct connection of story telling to life permitted our research group to make an equally direct connection to collaborative work in schools. The narrative approach encouraged us to talk about the possible space between our lives as principals and our personal lives. These two themes–living an educated life with living life, intertwined, (Bateson, 1996)–are demonstrated in a story told by Amber: *What I find is that my taking care of the people is now coming back to how they are taking care of me. It happened at the end of my first year. The staff had put together a beautiful basket. They put in funny cartoons, a bottle of wine, some bubble bath, a foot massager and all kinds of really nice things. They threw some photos in the* *basket, too, and some really nice notes saying "We're all in this together, so just get through it." They're not "my staff," we're there together.*

The conversation continued about the importance of relationships as a starting point to begin improving practice in a safe and trusting way. Margaret used these words: *It seems to me, that if we're talking about improving schools, relationships are the base for us to move onto that collegial level where we engage. Because if you have relationships in place, it's safe to share your craft knowledge and to talk about practice.* Emily took the conversation another step further: *It is the good questions that build relationships. When I think back to my experiences in a school, we did a lot of journalling. We were asking those good questions that caused people to do personal reflection and then to share openly. And it was the sharing, it was the open sharing, that caused the high trust to build. Until you have that conversation take place, it is difficult to begin the change. Because teachers are vulnerable and concerned about having others come into their rooms. They worry that "What if I'm not as good a teacher as they think I am?"* Teresa, in response, added: *If we could just open up a dialogue...so when you're talking, you actually declare yourself. When you're building that trusting relationship, is it that we declare what we believe, where we stand in terms of learning and teaching?* Emily: *Our questions?* Margaret: *And slowly but surely our declarations become more obvious, about where we stand on an issue. In a staff, in order to grow, in order for people to really change, to break set with what they believe or what they've done for a long, time, you have to feel very safe, you have to have a high trust, there can't be a lot of ego needs getting in the way. If they [ego needs] get in the way, I don't think you can move to new things.*

Joan joined in: *It doesn't work for anyone when there's no relationship. It doesn't work for children when there's no relationship with the teacher, it doesn't work for teachers. It doesn't work for principals, it doesn't work for any of us. Relationships serve to soften the difficult times and preserve the good times.* In Emily's words: *I think that if you're authentic and you are people-connected, they'll forgive you when you blow it, and they'll be with you. I always say to my staff, "You'd think after all these years I'd know better, but you know...".*

Leading the Conversations

Leading conversations that eventually progress to professional cultures is an act of involvement and leadership. By bringing participants together to listen and talk, climates of expectancy are developed and self-development may be attained. In the following stories and conversations, the principal's role as catalyst and enabler in facilitating the growth of staff members is evident. Joan began with this conversation about a teacher who had made a significant change in her behaviour. *I have a teacher who changed this year, and it was a remarkable change. In the past, she was colder, more businesslike, and the kids and the parents would often complain because they didn't get their Valentine party or that she wasn't warm. She did a pretty good job of teaching, but she wasn't warm with any of us. She was always cold and quickly left the building. And this year she's really warm and quite loving, and she even comes to us [the administration] and says, 'I think you need a hug today–it looks like you had a difficult time with a parent.' I'm thinking, 'What happened?' She was changing. I noticed a slow change, but I've had this person on my staff for nine years and this year, this transformation is like another person.* When we explored how she might have facilitated this change, Joan reflected on her actions: *We were always willing to listen and tried not to judge her unfairly. We pointed out where change was needed.* In retrospect, Joan also acknowledged that the teacher in question was working on personal issues, some of which had been resolved, making her professional life less stressful.

Emily added to Joan's story with one of her own: *Sometimes you don't know people's stories. I can remember having a teacher a number of years ago who had phenomenal management problems, and he had a stuttering problem as well. He had been a teacher who had been moved from school to school because he always had trouble, so they [Human Resources] kept moving him on. And after he had been with us a year, I was called and asked if I wanted to move him again. I said, "No." I didn't feel he was someone who needed to be moved on; I think he was somebody who needed to stay. And, as it turned out, after about three years in the school, he actually ended up leaving the profession, but leaving with a lot of dignity. Several years later, he sent me a card—quite a beautiful card—these are stories you never forget. We met for lunch, but all he talked about was when he grew up, how he was brought up in a family where children should be seen and not heard, and he was always told to shut up and be quiet. So when he got to be a teacher in a classroom, he could not tell kids to be quiet because it was so much a part of his upbringing and his lack of positive self-esteem that he couldn't bring himself to do it. Yet, he was the most beautiful human being that you would ever want to meet. He ended up at Worker's Compensation where he's made a meaningful contribution. But sometimes that teacher in that situation has a lot of other things attached to why things aren't working. Who would have ever thought that?*

Both these stories illustrate the capacity we have as leaders to begin conversations in schools that encourage people to learn more about themselves. In each situation, the principal and the teacher played a role in a conversation that ultimately made a difference. Ensuring the relationship was strong enough to sustain the conversation was critical. By finding new and different patterns for solving difficult problems, we grow together. In Carl Rogers' (1959) view, persons become actualised, that is, more coherent and transparent. This process is evident in these stories. Our response as human beings is a dual one: to become more dependent but independent, more inter-connected yet self-directed. This duality, according to Rogers, indicates healthy human development. Costa and Garmston (1994) refer to this as *holonomy*, the achieving of goals of independence and interdependence. Emily and Joan's stories show the evidence of wholeness in their communities, their attempts to make sense of senselessness. Today, principals are frequently called upon to address such compelling issues with students, staff, and parents. As a result of our conversations in this group, we believed it was critical that an environment for making and sharing meaning exist in a school in order to maintain an inquiring stance and strive for many, satisfying solutions.

Forging Relationships for Growth

By sharing past critical incidents and other narratives of our professional lives we began thinking about what we do to create communities of learners in our schools. We started out by exploring how principals might create opportunities for both themselves and teachers to grow. Paul chose to tell a meaningful story from his past. In this story, both he and another participant, Teresa, were working together on the administrative team of a relatively new school. As well, both were new to their administrative positions in the school and were struggling with change. The staff appeared to be less than receptive, possibly because the previous administrative team had not had a strong positive relationship with staff. Paul and Teresa decided to approach the problem head-on and hold individual meetings with each person. Paul tells the story: *"Let's do one-on-ones." This was such a turnaround, culturally, in the school. We structured the experience by saying, "You can take this issue and respond to it, or come in to the meeting and do your own thing." I was so awed by what they [the staff] talked about and their learning. We have one person who is new on staff, and he* *told me, "I don't know what to do. I've been teaching twenty years, and I've never sat down with my administrator and had a conversation. Is this an evaluation? Is this something to be scared about?" I said, "It's an opportunity to sit down and have a talk, find out where you're at."* For Paul, this was an act of breaking set and beginning to establish new ways of working together with staff. Teresa, who remembered the incident well, continued the conversation with this reflection: *I am rereading Roland Barth's, Run Schools, Run. Barth says that not enough attention has been paid to the adult relationships in the school, and collegiality. I think relationships have to be there in order for them to develop into what Barth calls collegiality, which he distinguishes from congeniality. We were moving to a collegial relationship with the teachers.* Helen moved the conversation further: *Talking about the possibilities of relationship and the role we play as principal, in evoking that potential for trusting relationships in the school, whether it's you with teachers or you somehow trying to create opportunities for other teachers, you are creating those linkages, those things that can help us to focus.* The group, by expressing their understanding in narrative conversation, were reconnecting with themselves and their professional practice. Their beliefs about the importance of the personal relationship in making change were upheld in these stories.

Breaking Set with the Old

Our conversation began to move rapidly with the introduction of the "breaking set" idea that Lambert et al. (1995) described in detail. According to the authors, in order to make change, people must break set with old habits or assumptions. These processes necessitate a reconstruction, a re-examination of accepted ideas or traditional interpretations. Lambert et al. say to "break set" is to loosen old attachments and dependencies on former assumptions in order to consider new assumptions (p. 36). By confronting or processing new information, individuals "break set" with older ideas and begin to form new schemas and ways of looking, different perceptions, and ultimately new behaviours. This involves gathering new data, posing questions that cause dissonance and disequilibrium and redesigning new ideas. The reconceptualization may involve imagination, visualisation, speculating and reframing. As we begin to look in a different way, we see possibilities for change, growth, making sense of new ideas.

Bob talked about a "breaking set" approach he and other colleagues were considering. *Some people that I associate with wanted to do a day where we'd spend time in each other's school. We'd go to one another's school for an hour, and just share what we're doing and be able to dialogue with another colleague. I know where I do a good job and I know where I'm abysmal. I should have the courage or would like to have courage to say, "Come in, watch for this and whatever else you pick up, let me know, because I really want to talk to you about these things." I know the questions I need to be asking myself.*

There are many questions we could be asking ourselves but do we take the time and the courage to ask them? The conversation turned to the upcoming change in evaluation strategies for teachers. Alberta Education has issued a policy position paper, *An Integrated Framework to Enhance the Quality of Teaching* (1997), calling for an annual professional development plan to be undertaken by all continuous contract teachers describing in detail their personal and professional plans for a current school year. Teresa re-entered the conversation at this point with her comment: *I would hope that the Quality of Teaching document is going to help take us there, because it seems to me what we're saying is that the professional model is continuous professional growth. That removes the top-down evaluation and I think it will free staff to engage in talk about practice, the sharing and the visiting. The onus is going to be on us [the principals] to provide the environment. I see the challenge will be one of setting the* *environment or tone for all those other things to happen. And again, the relationship is part of that. But when you start to work on that environment or that tone, then people begin to take over. That's when they exercise their leadership from within.*

In learning to tell, to listen, and to respond, we ultimately began to uncover significant educational consequences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Amber spoke of how breaking set in the expectations of the principal is seen: *I think the picture of the principal is changing too. As short a time as I've been in this, it's changing our relationships too. I find what used to be decisions of the principal are no longer decisions exclusively of the principal. And having much more involvement from parents and staff in community decisions, I think, is shifting that to some degree, also. Some people want to hang onto that old picture, "Just tell me what to do." I don't happen to be working with many that are like that. They're embracing the opportunity to have a real say in their daily lives. I think the picture is changing, which, thankfully, is changing the landscape for those relationships. The power issues are changed.* Emily commented on Amber's statement in this way: *Sometimes that hits you in the face, doesn't it? When somebody comes and says, "Is it all right if I do this?" I've had that experience where I think, "Why are they asking me that?" Do they feel that they need my approval? Because you're hoping that you've created a situation where they feel more independent. But sometimes that question comes and hits you every now and again. It makes you stop in your tracks and think.* Michael joined the conversation with his story of a staff member: *I'm in a situation where I have a staff member in whom I was quite disappointed in terms of the pedagogy and resources that were being used. I didn't have a relationship with that person, and when I did bring her in, because I believe to applaud publicly and to discipline privately, I shared my concerns. The next morning I was hit with a letter–"You're not valuing what I'm doing, and you want me to teach the way you teach. I'm not your clone."* Michael's pain resonated for each of us. Paul immediately responded to normalise the situation: *That's part of the evolution of a* *relationship. How can I put it? I used to look forward to those opportunities of crisis. If you're blessed with one of those opportunities, your true self shows through. I can say that now, I couldn't say it then. It's the same thing in any relationship. Scott Peck [1995] maintains that until you reach the point of crisis, you can never build community, you can never build a relationship. Everything else is the façade that comes before. It [a crisis] is primary to show what you are about and, for that person involved, the question then becomes "How do we get over this hump?" I'm different with different individuals on the staff because that's their need. Some want me to be formal; others want to be friendly; some professional yet friendly. And some want you to touch them, because they are touchy-feely people themselves. Others have a bubble space, and you respect that. When I look back at where I started with this particular staff and where I am now, their wish for me was to be the principal. There were no ifs, ands, or buts about it. They wanted me to be the principal. In fact, one person came in and said, "Don't worry about our relationship. I don't care if you like me or I like you. I just want you to be the principal." That's what the need was at the time. That same person has a very different point of view today. That person is very, very friendly and encourages the relationship that we have. But it's an evolution, I think. You've really got to be very careful when you get into a crisis, especially the first one, because they're [the staff] all looking. You just hope you get it over with quickly and deal with it well. But you can never go wrong if you deal with it from a people point of view. If you look at the problem only in its generic form, without looking at the people who surround it, you're going to get yourself in trouble.*

Dysfunctional Relationships

Because teaching is a human endeavour, it is rife with complexities. Paul's story is a good illustration of the multiple expectations of the role of the principal. Attempting to build a relationship with some staff is precarious. For these few, their boundaries are more tightly drawn and they maintain them with a different degree of vigilance than do others. The principal must try to read between the lines and predict the appropriate amount of attention. Teresa tells a story that expressed her concern because she had cared too much. She explained it this way: *I've been stung by relationships too where there were times when I felt I had a relationship, and then I ended up feeling used. I felt that a staff member expected more of me because of a relationship. And I've been in the situation where I was friends with someone before I came to the staff, and because I could not do everything that person wanted me to do, I felt like I had personally failed that person. That was really hard; I found it very difficult. So I don't think it's necessarily a friendly relationship.* There was an element of anguish in this story as Teresa related it to us. Her last statement raises a question that needs further clarification. Can you strike a friendly relationship with staff?

When Helen first became a principal she asked herself this question: *"Where's my relationship with my colleagues?" Because all of a sudden you're alone and they are unsure and testing you as to what you're going to be like. But, over time, I realised that sometimes I am going to be alone in this relationship, or in a different type of relationship with them, walking around a bit more.* Joan joined in, with empathy: *What I realised after a few years as a principal, was that it was really lonely. It was such a separation.*

Another group member, Amber, added to Teresa's story by describing what had happened in her district the previous year: *We watched our partner school, the other elementary in our town, just go through a horrific year last year because two staff members were on the fringe, so to speak. The whole school went through crisis. And* *every time we as administrators got together, I thought, "There's me at any time."* This second story taken alongside the first illustrates the vulnerability these principals often felt in their day-to-day work in schools. While we all believed relationships must be built in order to make a safe environment for change, there was often a personal cost attached to our efforts. Listen to Joan as she speaks about a difficult time in her principalship: *If there had been no one there to listen to my stories and sort me out sometimes along the way*...Emily: *Yes, be there.* Joan: *I would have left.* The responsibility this group of principals felt in keeping the staff and the students engaged in a meaningful way was also evident in Helen's words: *A school is a very close-knit community. If one piece of it hurts, all of it hurts. You can't just say, "We can just lop off that piece."* As principals relaying our experiences, we found no simple solution to this issue.

Relationships of Change

Margaret continued the conversation with another reading from Linda Lambert et al.:

> *Since leadership is viewed as essentially the enabling reciprocal processes among people, leadership becomes manifest within the relationships in a community—manifest in the spaces, the fields among participants rather than in a set of behaviours performed by an individual leader. The school culture, the field in which we work, is permeated with opportunities for exercising leadership of this character. Greene finds in these spaces among us the possibilities for creating an authentic presence with each other, being real and vulnerable with each other in ways that engage us in genuine conversations. (1995, p. 32)*

Creating that space for an authentic presence is often time-consuming and sometimes not welcomed. Yet these principals knew how important it was to develop relationships that provide opportunities for growth and reflection. Teresa talked about a staff member in her school: *I know it [relationship] has to really count, because this year we have a new staff member, and the signs and the information that are coming to me would suggest that the person doesn't have the relationships with students I would hope for. I'm finding it a challenge to deal with, because I don't yet have a relationship with the person in question. If the relationship was in place, I think that it would be easier for me to deal with it, because I think people do trust you and they know that you have their interests as well as the children's interests at heart. They already have that trust–that you only want things to be better. I'm finding it a very delicate thing.* In pursuing this further with Teresa and the other group members, we discussed her next steps.

Helen added to this conversation by explaining what she does to influence change: *If I'm going to effect any change with them, first of all I guess I have to examine whether there needs to be a change. Or maybe it's the mode that they operate in that I don't think is the best mode. I have to look at my relationship with that person to see if I can help them reflect on what they're doing with kids. And so, for me, that's where it begins to go in a different direction in terms of relationships because I'm pushing, and I know I'm pushing. I'm pushing them to ask themselves, "Did your actions help that student, or not? Or what else could you do?" That's uncomfortable. That makes more tension in relationships than just being a friend or being liked by everyone, or just to say, "Yes, eighty percent of your staff think you're a great leader." They can have confidence in you and like you. I could take them having the confidence that they may not like what you're doing, but they think you're doing what needs to be done.*

Emily entered this part of the conversation, helping all of us to recognise the importance of balancing friendship and pleasantness with the push to improve: *Your goal is that everything would be collaborative and together, but depending on the dynamic of the staff and the individuals that come in, you sometimes have to massage that. And yet, you just can't be a people-pleaser because then when it does come to the crunch, nobody will have any confidence. So looking back on my twenty years, it's a complex relationship that you have with staff.*

The Dreaded One-Percent

While the group of principals gathered here was open to the change to a professional model of evaluation for most teachers, they showed their concern for those few teachers they felt needed more guidance. Emily put it this way: *It's so hard for us, because you always worry about that one-percent. What about that teacher who's slacking off and the one that's not doing the job. You're really worried. I guess you can do a summative evaluation, but maybe it isn't quite that serious that you feel it should be summative. But you're disappointed in that person. They're not growing professionally, their program is blasé, and nothing exciting is happening.* This was a concern for the principals in this group. The conversation continued with Helen's remarks: *The ones I'm struggling with right now are the ones I have to deal with, because those are the ones I really need to work on. And then, out of that, the relationship will grow, but the ball is still in my court because I'm saying, "This is what I think I need; this is what will help me." And then, after that, with staff, I say, "Tell me what you did this year, and write me about it." And then I write a letter back to them (because I cannot do the checklist) and get them to say, "I need to really work on not yelling at kids" rather than me saying, "I've noticed you raise your voice sometimes." I think those teachers, even the fringe ones, they know they're fringe.*

Margaret: *So that's a question, that's a really hard question. How do you get them to get to that point? That has to be a good place to start our next story together.*

A Last Word

As the conversation ended, Joan added a last comment. Her sense of concern about the tasks that principals carry daily on their shoulders was obvious. Her comment that, perhaps, too much is expected of principals resonated with all of our experiences. *The role of the principal in all of these stories is so important. I can't be that responsible! I can't! I feel like it's such a weighty thing. You feel that you're some kind of a god. You're responsible for putting the weather into the school, the climate, and the environment. You're creating everything, and you're responsible. Somehow, they [the staff and parents] think you have all this power. There are so many things they expect of your skills or your job description.* Emily: *It's kind of frightening, isn't it?* Joan: *It's terrible. I hear these stories and I think, I'm not going back to work!*

Looking back from where we've come with this conversation, we deliberately focused our comments, in an effort to understand, on the lived actions of our lives, our intentions, goals and experiences (Vitz, 1990). We were attempting, by sharing our successes and failures openly, to provide not just data for this research project, but also, "a picture of real people, in real situations, struggling with real problems" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 4). The story that was generated was about our collective efforts to try to understand how we weave human relationship webs into our professional lives. Our relationships with teachers, no matter how rewarding or messy, and their effect on our personal lives and professional work, was our focus.

Crossing the boundaries between the distinct places that we live as teachers and as human beings was complex and confusing. The crossings were often blurred and misunderstood. By sharing stories this group of principals attempted to make meaning about relationships. The framework that shaped the collection of stories emerged from our attempts to understand the boundaries between different places where we work as well as the shifts in power needed to forge new staff relationships and difficulties such shifts create. The acts of leadership that were described as a result of trying to break set with old assumptions and making new meanings were courageous and personally risky. And, acknowledging the responsibility of ensuring that people sustained a continuing conversation about their professional growth took its emotional toll. Even so, we remained committed to our efforts to influence the creation of webbed relationships in schools. Despite setbacks, every person believed this approach was worthy of our labors. Therefore, we closed our first collective story with advice from *The Constructivist Leader* (Lambert et al., 1995): "Engage with another in reciprocal processes, commit yourself to a relationship as a peer, share work together, talk often about your common purpose, and laugh together" (p. 58).

Chapter Three

Crossroads and Crises

Tuesday, March 18th, marks the third meeting of our research group. In a salute to St Patrick, the patron saint of Irish hopefuls, we sit about enjoying Irish coffee. The group members are tired. It shows in their faces and is evident in their words. Our conversation is shaped, by it being the start of the second reporting period in most schools. Our discussion favors the role of the principal during such times in the school.

In an effort to animate the participants, Margaret describes what has emerged from the past two meetings. There are over one hundred pages of transcripts from our "collective conversations" and the personal narratives number at least ten pages. "*If you have the time, perhaps you can take your narratives, read them and make the changes you wish. That's all part of our working and telling this story together. I want your words to come out in a way that you want would want them to.*" No one responds to this remark. A sense of quiet resignation settles over the group.

Later, in her journal, Margaret reflects: *"Everyone in the group seemed worn out. Not necessarily physically tired, but mentally exhausted. It's as though, after our initial gathering and the excitement of meeting one another, we are beginning to struggle with our purpose and why we are here. It may mean we either commit more deeply to one another and to our reasons for meeting or that some of us move on to more satisfying places. We are approaching, at the same time, a border and a crossroad."*

Borders and Crossroads

What was the meaning of this silent reflection? How does one understand the terms border and crossroad with respect to community? What are the qualities of this landscape? Connelly and Clandinin (1995) speak eloquently about the boundaries of the educational landscape. There is a safe place where we feel free to tell our secret stories. And there are those other places of moral persuasion and abstract knowledge where our cover stories hold the day. The boundaries between the two places begin to blur, however, as groups become communities and pledge commitment to one another. Members can then begin to reveal their secret stories and hear their personal voices, leaving behind their cover stories. These groups feel safe examining their personal responses. By making a commitment to ask the hard questions, they cross over to one another and re-examine their answers. More often, these crossroads are their acceptance of the multiple understandings that occur when making meaning. This un-covering is an act of vulnerability that makes persons truly present to one another.

But some groups are unable to cross the boundary between the two places and refuse to engage. Their refusals create a border, an impediment that blocks disclosure. By not engaging in the connection and revealing their secret stories, the individuals may place serious limitations on the quality of their relationship. A barrier to further communication is imposed.

Most groups of individuals, as they form communities, face dilemmas such as these. Will we become a community or continue as a group of individuals? Will we cross the border that strips us of our preconceptions and misconceptions or will we continue to live out our cover stories? Will we reveal the stories of our secret selves and question our habits of heart and mind? Will we come to the place, a knowledge community, perhaps, where we can construct knowledge and make meaning for ourselves and each other?

Leading the Conversations

Our third session began with a question intended to help us to reflect upon and re-examine our intentions in a deliberate way. The question posed was both a test for me (my candidacy examination loomed three days ahead!) and a way to provoke further thinking on our purposes: *What are we doing, and why are we doing it, and what use has it got? What is it that principals do in their daily actions to enable growth?*

I was the first to test my answer: *We are working together to try and get a better understanding, a deeper understanding, of what it is that principals do to help teachers to grow and to continue growing in their schools. I'm suggesting that we focus on the work of Linda Lambert, her constructivist work, when she speaks about reciprocal processes. Things like evoking trust and setting a relationship, and putting these as prime roles of the principal. And then working with teachers to get them to really think about and question their teaching or question the habits of their heart and mind. Finally, to think about new intentions and new purposes and to put those into action. These reciprocal processes are at the core. And so, by telling stories, where we lead the conversations, by sharing our experiences and school stories, I hope we'll get a deeper understanding of what it is that we do. Why stories? Because I think, as practitioners, we don't pay enough attention to our stories. If you ask people to theorise, anybody can say, "I do such and such." But if you ask people to tell a story, their values and the* *beliefs come out much more clearly in their language, the language of practice.* My response was one of the many shared in the conversations ahead.

Modeling the Way

Teresa entered the conversation: *I think that the ways we model, the questions we ask, are so important. I remember listening to Emily long ago saying that sometimes you just ask a question. I remember your example, Emily, about going in and seeing kids' spelling marks charted on the wall.* Remembering the original story from a workshop she had given some time ago, Emily responded to Teresa: *"Tell me about this."* Their exchange continued with Teresa's next comment: *Asking a question, yes, asking, "Could you tell me about this?"* Emily: *Yes. That's how I learned. Somebody taught me that many years ago and asked me that question.* Teresa: *And to me there's got to be a way of asking them that causes teachers to reflect on their practice and doesn't necessarily take away their dignity at that moment either. I remember you making that comment, and it stuck with me.*

Thus we began our third collective conversation by responding to the question of what principals might do to lead the conversations that enable teachers to grow. As Margaret phrased it: *How do you get a person to question whether or not theirs is the only way, the best way? How do you ask those hard questions?* Leading conversations is a fundamental role of leaders, especially constructivist leaders. Because conversations give form to "the reciprocal processes of leadership that makes up the spaces among us, they create the text of our personal and professional lives" (Lambert et al., 1995). While understanding that knowledge is constructed by the learner, and the responsibility for that learning comes from within (Rogers, 1983), it is often up to us as principals and leaders to promote a continuous learning attitude and a safe environment that will support teachers and encourage experimentation. By trusting staff to make appropriate decisions about their professional and personal growth, staff members more openly admit their "cover stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996) and take chances with their learning and teaching. Cover stories are the explanations we employ before our masks are removed and our habits of heart and mind are revealed. Cover stories can be explored and uncovered by principals and teachers who are willing to risk and who believe that growth occurs once it's safe to reveal the layers. Teresa recalled a conversation she had with her supervisor: *We're creatures of habit, and I think we want the staff to come forth with ideas. But in order to have that happen, I still think there has to be that learning environment created. I think we [principals] have a large part to do with that because we can either cultivate it or we put it down.*

Our cover stories often trap us into routines or patterns that keep us in places where change can't occur. If these can be called into question, we may, in our conversations, begin to re-value them. How then do we pose leading questions that will foster the conversations that search for sense-making, shared intentions, and unconditional listening?

Teresa continued: *This question was posed to me: "How could we develop a process where we could look at how we do things? Are we going to do anything differently?" We came up with the idea that we'd establish a small think tank and get a group of people together to do some divergent thinking. The question set an expectation about how we might approach this, and how we may have an opportunity to do some things differently.*

The process brought home to me how the people who are key in our professional lives foster an expectation or a climate, and can create high performance with low anxiety. We want people to perform to high expectations but experience low anxiety. I think that's the trick.

This was a revelation to all of us because it relayed a key purpose that we need to attend to when trying to foster change. To set a climate for change, to provoke people to think about expectations, to look at new ways to accomplish work, all these suggest ways in which we might lead conversations to enable growth. But the conversations must be presented safely and in a nurturing fashion, to maintain dignity, yet challenge people to change.

We began talking about the process of student reporting and how it presents meaningful opportunities to call practice into question. Joan was struck by how significant the process of reporting student's progress is in the growth of her teachers: *I find we ask those questions about how we do report cards. For example, we always do interviews the same way. The parents come in, we tell them about their children, have a fifteen or twenty minute conversation, they go home. But something different—portfolios, demonstration of learning or center-type activities—seems to have more effect than the others. Talking about that–that's how change can begin.* By trying something a little different, we call into question our habits and our cover stories. The risk may be greater but, then, so too, are the rewards.

Emily: *You know what I noticed in my own school? When you do the comments [on report cards], it's modelling going on. You're not writing a lot, but I think the comments are helpful for people who tend to say the same thing. You see some of* *yourself in some of the comments they make. I think those are really good opportunities for growth for teachers.*

Corners for Conversations

Listen as Joan shares with the group: *This is what you're talking about, how people converse, how they do that professional development standing in the hallway.* Emily: *Doing the working together.* Joan: *I watched three teachers, three Grade 3 teachers standing in the hallway. I walked by once; they're talking. I walked by twice; they're talking. I stopped and said, "What are you talking about?" "Oh, we're still working on that unit. We've got the* Sarah, Plain and Tall *books now, and we're just talking about that." And so I walked by four times, because things weren't going very well, and they said, "Oh, we have an idea, Joan." "Oh, we have another idea, but I don't think you're going to like this one."*

And it was about how to give them more time to plan: How could we give them more time to watch each other at work and work together? "What would you think if we brought them [the three classes] together and we talked together and we worked together on certain things?" I said, "Why not? Try it and see how it goes." They were standing there for about thirty-five minutes with their books in their hands, on their way out of the door. And they stood and stood and worked out whatever they were working out, and I was asked twice to come into the conversation. And I thought: This is how they share. This is what they do. This is how they do it. Michael: *But obviously, you've developed a relationship of trust, because they can bounce those ideas off of you in the hallway: "Joan, what do you think of this, and what* *do you think of that?" Obviously, you've developed some kind of rapport, a relationship with these individuals, in order for them to share things that they want to work on.*

Carlsen (1988) has described the meaning making process evolving above. She describes the importance of four elements that are central to the interaction for meaning: the presence of a "holding environment," the gathering of data or information, a search for patterns or processes, and a reinforcement of new abilities to think about one's own thinking. Two key elements, the gathering of data and the search for patterns are similar for other action researchers (Sagor, 1992). As the three teachers in Joan's school discussed possibilities they practised and articulated new ideas and patterns. Joan's role became one of reinforcing the ideas and supporting this informal but highly productive process of making meaning. Michael's comment about rapport is a fitting description of the "holding environment" Carlson speaks about. Because "there are few things as intimate as constructing meaning in the presence of another" (Kegan, 1982, p.16), trust is a critical component.

Our comments turned to the facilitative roles we play in leading staff to further their growth. Margaret talked about her school's conversation corner: *Yes, we had a corner in my school. It wasn't a corner; it was just that all the hallways met at one place right out in front of the office. I had a tendency to stand there because you could see all the kids coming in from different places and the teachers moving to their places. Everybody would collect there in a little cluster, and that's where the news of the day was shared. It wasn't in the staff room as much as it was in that little spot there. I wonder how many people have those corners?* Joan remarked on how her staff approaches the art of conversing: *We have a soapbox corner, one corner on the south* *side of the school. I definitely made it the soapbox corner, and a few people gather there. If there's something they want to complain about, this is the corner. If I want to find out about something, I stand at that corner. This is the soapbox corner. This year is not as bad, but last year there were always people on the soapbox corner!* Emily joined in: *The library is our gathering spot sometimes. I'm not sure if it's always productive conversation. That might be my gripe area, that spot. That would be my suspicion. It's away from everything, and, if the principal did something that didn't quite go with your way of thinking, you might want to growl about it. It's a safe place because it's far away. So if you want to have a little growl, I think that's a good spot. I'm sure there's lots of positive conversation going on there too, but I also think it's a growl spot.* Other people mentioned their corners. For Bob, it was his staff room at the end of the day. *We sit around with microwave popcorn and discuss the events of the day. It's when we are all relaxed and can talk about all the issues before us in a humorous but helpful way.* These helpful environments provide legitimate places for teachers and principals to converse. They are the crossroads in our schools' landscapes where persons make meaning and respond to one another's different realities.

A Taxonomy of Conversations

From places where people begin to dialogue, we moved in our discussion towards what provokes the different kinds of conversations that occur in these and other places. Life in schools offers many opportunities for different kinds of conversations. An exchange between teacher and principal about a student, a curriculum concern, or a professional development request offer occasions for coaching and mentoring, problem finding and problem solving, visioning and conceptualizing. Working with each teacher offers a different, reflective search for meaning that can be highly personalized. Emily began by talking about the importance she believes that conversations hold in a self-renewing school: *I think so often it is asking the right question—it doesn't have to be the right question, but a good question. Sometimes we're asking the same questions to get the same answers. That's what I like about* Reclaiming Higher Ground, *a book that I'm looking at right now. He's [the author] saying that as educators we've got all the pat answers, but often we're not asking the right questions. I see it as a collaborative process.*

What are the elements common to conversations like these? Lambert et al. speak of a "taxonomy of conversations" (1995, p. 85), that is, levels of talk that range from a purposeful meeting or discussion, a dialogic conversation, to an inquiring, problem-solving conversation, to that of a sustaining conversation, where conceptual visioning and sustaining direction is provided. Equally important is "communicative competence" (Habermas, 1973), the genuine pursuit of truth in a nurturing environment. But what is truth in a constructivist context? The honest attempt to interpret our current experience based on our past experiences, beliefs, and perceptions, is one way to fully understand and to seek truth. Thus, our current understanding is our best present knowledge and will evolve and change over time. Our conversations are "characterised by the shared intention of genuine truth-seeking, remembrances from the past, a search for meaning in the present, a mutual revelation of ideas and attitudes, and respectful listening" (Lambert et al., p. 85).

Our search for meaning, that is, asking the questions that lead us into conversations that share our intentions, became our focus for the next round of comments and talk. Most of us saw the student reporting process as an opportunity for respectful listening and reciprocal revelation of ideas and information.

Margaret opened an inquiring conversation during report card time with one of her staff members in this way: *I wrote a note and said something like, "Have you ever thought about...?" If I saw something in their report cards that I thought would be a good opening to their continued growth, I found that a good approach. You don't always have formal PD with teachers; it's the little things that make the difference because each teacher is so highly individualised. I think that's where they begin their growth. I realised the more I heard, that the reporting process promotes your talking to teachers in an individualised way about their successes and strengths as well as the areas that need work.*

Emily took up the conversation and described how she begins the talk: *Reading report cards helps teachers to grow. I read them, and if I have a question, I look at the student profile as well, because if I've got a student who's at the ninety-ninth percentile and he's got Cs, I want to know why. So I'll put a little red flag up and say [to the teacher], "I'm having difficulty understanding this. Is the profile wrong?" I try to ask a question back to the teacher: "You're the professional person. You have a better answer than I do. I just need to understand it because I may have the parent in my office."* This approach, an honouring of the teacher's wisdom, often evolves into a sharing of information and the development of a deeper, professional relationship. In Costa and Kallick's (1993) description, a "critical friend" is:

> *a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes time to understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. (p.50)*

Several of the principals gathered here have been invited to take on the role of a "critical friend" in their relationships with teachers. By asking questions, positively re-framing incidents or offering different insights, these people work together trying to make meaning about the ongoing work of learning and teaching.

Teresa entered the conversation with her thoughts about the process of reporting and its value in promoting communication with the parent community: *I partly judge the success of how we assessed and reported based on the feedback I receive when I walk the halls during the parent-teacher conferences. And one of the things I like being able to say is, "I saw your report card. Mom and Dad, aren't you pleased?" So reading the report cards allows that. But I judge the rest of the success from what kind of feedback I get from parents. So if nobody comes in and says, "What was this about?" Then I think that we've had a successful reporting period, in that nobody's been surprised.* Her comments are somewhat reminiscent of what Lambert et al. (1995) would call partnering conversations. Partnering conversations go farther than what has been described above because they involve professional networking as well as parental involvement activities, engaging teachers as professionals with professionals beyond the school in their evolving, communal understanding of what learning and teaching is. Teresa's efforts are an opening to that possibility.

In the opinion of these principals, reporting practices provide a great deal of room for discussion about classroom practices. By their nature, report cards reveal what we value and to what we pay attention. Margaret and Joan had the last word: *If you hold certain values or beliefs, are you staying true to those in the way you assess and report?* Michael responded: *Now, that's a good question.* Margaret: *So, we need to turn down the sound and look at the actions*. Joan: *And assessment surely tells us what we treasure.*

The Sustaining Conversation

Teresa also recognised the importance of report cards for starting inquiring conversations: *I asked some people yesterday after school about their source of professional growth. We got into a conversation, and as I listened to them I said, "It's one of those things in life that in some ways is so simple, but it's also so profound." I think some of the ways that we might encourage growth or set the stage for growth is probably so simple yet so profound. And when we have to deal with someone, whether it's a report card or something that someone has done that we know to be wrong, part of my influencing their growth has to do with the modelling at that time.*

Teresa: *So I think if we say we're a child-centred school or we say that every child's free to take a risk or that we accommodate student differences, well, then, do we put the child down in a comment because they took language arts in a different place or whatever? Then I don't think we're being true to who we say we are.*

Margaret: *Without always doing the formal PD, you need the opportunity to say, "Aha! So that's what Jill's thinking about teaching reading in Grade Two this year" or by the report card. Maybe it's those kinds of things that tell us, as teachers of teachers, in a sense, what it is that we need to do more of or less of.*

The movement to inquiring conversations was evident in these last comments as principals described their work in discovering what teachers already know about the topic or issue under question. The constructivist position is that meaning making is developmental and constantly being reshaped and co-developed. By assisting teachers to find resources and conceptualise ways of solving their problems, the knowledge community is sustained and renewed.

Can sustaining conversations, those that continue, endure, and develop over a period of time, also be an integral part of the school culture? They are time-consuming and need to happen on a regular basis. As well, everyone must have a clear understanding of the purposes of such conversations. Frequently, as a result of the time assigned and the focus on purposeful talk, a move from polite interactions to authentic talk about teaching and learning can occur.

Questions that Promote Growth

Margaret: *Could you see yourselves as principals with a teacher and a professional development plan asking a question like that? "What are you going to do differently?"*

Teresa responded with these remarks: *Stressing the collegiality and the talk about professional practice, we have to remind ourselves that we do have these strategies. I was thinking, "What would be wrong with taking five minutes and posing a question at the beginning of every staff meeting..."* Emily: *I agree with that very much.* Teresa: *Just saying, "For five minutes either talk to the person next to you or at your table about..."* Emily: *"your burning question."* Teresa: *And that would be probably enough, because you know how our staffs are. They'll talk about that. We don't need to give them an hour, because five minutes more than likely gets the wheels turning.* Bob: *And then they'll go home and think about it.* Emily: *For instance, conversations about underachieving students, the conversation about how assessment isn't really clear. There are so many conversations around the reporting process. It really puts us back on target, I think, because it really is our work, and how we place value on the child in that participation in their work. I mean, school is either a place of success or failure for kids, depending on what conditions we create. So I think that the really big question is to challenge that as a staff, to look at that. And I'd like to share with my staff (when we get through the demonstration learning that we're doing tomorrow)* *about how we look at assessment. What are we doing for our bright lights who aren't achieving or our struggling children who are having so much difficulty?*

We recognize the value in asking questions not only for clarification but also for visualizing and re-conceptualizing our work as teachers. These probing, enduring, sustaining questions are the hallmarks of the renewable school, and create frequent conversations about what it means to teach and learn in a knowledge community. They are of great importance because they ask that we attend to the meaning and substance of change. They ensure that we go beyond the cosmetic treatment of an issue and respond with our core values.

Emily shared her story about a new teacher on her staff: *One teacher I was thinking about—a second-year teacher and a very good teacher—maybe has a little too much structure in her classroom. It was interesting that when I counted her report cards there were twelve different comments—almost fifty percent of her class where she had made a comment about kids not being attentive or staying focused. I said, "We have an interesting question to ask: Either it's a very hyper kind of class where a lot of kids are really active, or it may reflect on the fact that these kids need more hands-on kinds of activities." As a young teacher, this is a professional question, because it's a good opportunity for growth. And yet it's not threatening; it's a growth question.* Bob: *Which in turn would lead us to a professional development activity for that question, whether it be a single conversation or...* Emily: *It would. It could be that teacher might want to look at that as what type of professional-growth plan would be her choice, and knowing her as I do, she would say, "I want to learn about that," because that's what she's like. She wants to do everything—she's got that kind of enthusiasm. She wants to* *be—I think most people want that—to be the best that they can be. And if they're open to "Please tell me if there's something I could be doing differently," I'd like her to discover it for herself rather than me say, "I think you need to do more active learning." I think she's got to come up with it. But it was a good conversation.*

As principal, Emily opened the conversation but encouraged the teacher to meet her in the crossroads. Emily's sensitivity and the teacher's will to succeed helped them to locate themselves in an inquiring place on the school landscape. What could have been a border, became instead, a crossroads of understanding and growth.

Conversations of Change

Michael added a story about his efforts to foster change in a teacher on his staff:

I'd been going through all the report cards and I noticed one teacher had written the same language learning paragraph on all twenty-two report cards. Since two teachers split the Grade 2 classroom, the afternoon teacher had done a personalised message, while the morning Language Arts teacher had made all the same comments. After I got home I thought–I've got to tell her. So at noon hour I said, "Are you going to be staying a little later this afternoon?" I went on, "Can I touch base with you?" When she came in later I told her, "I'm not comfortable with all twenty-two report cards looking the same. You've given these kids no idea of how they're progressing in language learning. You've written a newsletter, not a report on their individual progress and I'm really uncomfortable with that." So she walked away, and I got a phone call about an hour later. She was at home redoing her report cards. She said to me, "By the time you're finished with me"—because I've been really working with her on areas she has to work *on, and I think she meant it honestly—"by the time you're finished with me, I'll be a better teacher."*

For Michael, this effort to foster change was risky. On the one hand, he acknowledged that the teacher appeared to have benefited, perhaps grudgingly, from his comments. He also knew that, as principal, he had a legitimate concern to share with the teacher. On the other hand, Michael admitted apprehension in discussing with the teacher her shortcomings. His fear was not unwarranted because, as many of the group members attested, a great deal of staff morale can be lost without careful consideration of the best way to phrase one's concern. But even more significant, the fear of reprisal from the teacher union is legendary. Increasingly, principals find themselves engaged in public relations commissions, formerly known as professional investigations, as a result of their actions to change teaching practices in their schools. Principals are generally underrepresented in such a commission and there is often, a difficult, ugly situation at the school level. Any, and often all, previous efforts to nurture a trusting, collaborative environment are lost or diminished. Staff members become anxious and principals find themselves on a slippery slope with little or no support from colleagues, their district, or their professional organisation. Michael's encounter had the potential to become an insurmountable border. Rather, by using careful phrasing and exquisite timing, it became, in time, a place of crossing over.

ATA Police

Emily, began to tell a story currently affecting many of her colleagues: *We had one of our principals, who's going through a public relations commission, offer to answer questions from her colleagues such as "How does this happen? What does it* *look like?" She's a very strong administrator but she laid out the whole process very well. She put it on the line and it took courage to do that.* Michael, who had attended the same meeting, joined in: *In that forum this morning, for the first time in a long time, after that individual had spoken, I felt an aura of trust in that room. You don't always get that because we're so conscious of the schools we represent and the work that we do. But she put it out there for us. And there was a lot of support for her in terms of what she's going through.*

Joan described a similar situation: *We have one principal suffering in that same area. The ATA [Alberta Teacher's Association] is coming. There's a serious problem at his school. The ATA police! And everybody is talking about his situation when he's not there. Everyone knows that this fellow is having difficulties. And part of it is just human frailty. He's a real human kind of a guy.* Several people in the group responded, with Emily's voice in the lead: *But don't you look and say, "That could be me." Everybody sitting in that room today—because the three principals who are involved in this are all people who are respected in the district—everybody sitting there is saying, "I could be next." Not that they're frightened to death, but they're saying, "Hey, if it can happen to them, it can happen to me." Any time*. Joan: *And we all need to know where our frailties are...*

The Buck Stops Here

Bob echoed what each of us was thinking. The responsibilities of principals are large and the perception that they are on their own is common: *I guess whatever I decide or whatever is decided, it doesn't matter; it's on my back. The one caveat that we all have is that we make the final decision. It ends up with me. You look at where* *things are going and how much is coming at you all the time, and I look at it and say, "I still have fifteen years left." And I do have a life, yes. I think that's one of the conflicts that I'm having now, is that I drop it when I go home. My life at one time was the job.* Emily: *It's hard, because we have so much to do. It's a very demanding job.* Joan: *And there are so many evening commitments that are related to the job. You're going back in the evening for this, that, and the other thing.* Michael: *In the inner city in the evening we are 'meetinged' to death! We're sitting on committees that have nothing basically to do with the school, but because it's related to the community and children and families, you must go. And many times you stay at school and go straight to the meeting at seven or seven-thirty.* Joan: *How do you take care of yourself in that situation? Do you say, "I'm not going in till noon tomorrow"?* Michael elaborated in a sardonic tone: *I walked into my school this afternoon. I came in at 1:05, after several meetings consecutively and one assistant said to me, "Good morning! Where have you been? You sure have started your day late." I said, "Maybe I was not here, but I can assure you I started my day earlier than you did."* Joan joined in with her views: *But the workaholic's attitude is that the best person is the one that comes in at six and stays until ten at night. Now, that's your best administrator, because they're so dedicated. But they're not alive!* Margaret: *And I don't think you can be a good principal if you don't have a life outside of school, because I don't think you're alert to the rest of the culture that's happening, to the trends*. Joan: *You're not alert to yourself! You don't even know who you are, know what you feel, what you care about, or even if you had a shower in the morning. I think you get to the point where you don't even know where you are—and I feel that* *way. Those sixty- or seventy-hour weeks there, I think, "Who am I? What am I doing?" My kids used to give me a hard time. They would say, "Well! You're coming home, are you? That's nice!" And the year we had a strike, they said, "Do you think ATA will let us have Christmas?"*

Troubles Ahead

The conversation was heating up when Bob introduced the next idea: *Paul, what happens if principals leave the association [Alberta Teacher's Association]?* Paul*: I'm looking at it now, and I don't feel like I'm being protected. I don't feel like I'm being represented.* Michael: *You're a sitting duck.* Emily: *That's how our principals feel.* Paul: *And with site-based decision-making, our teachers, as good a relationship as we have, they're starting to say, "And where do you stand?"* Margaret: *Yes, exactly. "Are you one of us or one of them?"* Emily: *I know in our district the principals do not deal [with the ATA]. Based on what's happening in our district and what they've seen happening to some of their own colleagues, they really don't feel safe as far as the ATA is concerned. In fact, some people are saying, "Who do we work for, the district or the ATA?" because they (the ATA) are sticking their nose into so many areas. [For example], whether you can go with Concordia [University College] or whether you can go with the University of Alberta for a practicum. They've got their nose into so many things, dictating.*

Our district is setting up a district protocol now so those things will be done through the district before anything else can happen because of these three [public relations] commissions. So I think it's taught everybody a lesson. But when we talked to the ATA representative, she admitted their staffing officer did a poor job in the *school: "He's just beginning, and he didn't understand the whole process." And we said, "At whose expense!" because the staff was totally demoralized by it. I think the ideal situation for any of us is that we would like to be truly collaborative. But I don't think we're living in that time right now. I think people are living in conflicting times. It's everything: it's not just the school scene. As a teacher I can go in, and I can talk about you as a principal and say that you're the worst [person] I have ever worked for. And as principal you don't ever get to know that I said that because I'm not held accountable for those words against you. And then when you get into those collaborative efforts, they [the Alberta Teachers Association] can waive the code [of ethics]. Our principals are really upset with the whole process. It's an ugly process, apparently. They say it's not only ugly for the administrator; it's ugly for everybody who's involved in it. It takes people years to heal from it. What kind of a process is that? It should be a process that validates everybody. If they [the ATA] are coming in to do some work in a school, they shouldn't leave the school in a worse condition than when they came in! The ATA admit that they have the largest numbers of PRCs [public relations commissions] going on that they have ever had in years.*

Teresa: *Do you think the problem is contractual, or do you think it's related to practice? Is it teachers filing complaints about administrators? Is it people being asked to change, for example? Or is it that they were going to do away with preps [preparation periods] next year to save dollars?* Emily: *It could be contractual in that way. I think it's also people resisting change of any kind. Sometimes it's entrenchment, or sometimes a wellness issue. And these people rally other people, they lodge a complaint, and then all of a sudden the whole school's in a mess.* Teresa: *Whereas it* *used to be a division office staff who would come in and say [change was necessary]. Now we're [principals] the bad guys.* Joan: *Yes, and they take a little bit of glee in that. I picked that up from our superintendent. You do it to each other then, that's a bit better.*

The evidence in these stories is clear that it is difficult for principals to have reciprocal relationships in schools. The prevailing structures in the system present barriers to authentic relations. The past patterns and models for lack of trust and confidence are so ingrained at every level that it is problematic to change the system in one place and not in another.

As a staff we sit down and make budget decisions; you know you're putting someone on the chopping block. You know program needs. It's the dance of the lemons. And of course these people feel hurt, and they're often experienced people who are tired, who maybe need a little support, a boost. Maybe you need to kick them out, but nobody's officially kicked them out, so this is the way they're going about doing it. So you've got a lot of hurt people out there. But if you've had relationships where you were let down many times, trust is nothing you want to take care of. No one took care of you, so you don't believe it's going to happen. I've got a couple of teachers, who have been kicked around in life, and they have a really hard time–they won't trust you. These people don't believe you're telling the truth or that you're going to really be there for them or do something for them. They do their job, but they never are fully with you. Joan continued: *And we don't know how to do this. The first time you tell someone they're surplus is difficult. For one thing, I wait till the last second because maybe I can change my mind. Somehow I can keep this person, so you don't tell them as soon as they might like to know. That's number one. And then whom do you choose? What will be your* *criteria? You've got the criteria of seniority but when everybody can teach in any elementary grade in a K to 4 school, it's tough.*

Margaret: *But you have to have an incredible intuitive sense about people in this work. You have to be able to read people so carefully.* Joan: *And you have to listen to them when they're not saying something.* Margaret: *Some people you act quickly with, and other people you don't. Your skills—I'll use the word political, meaning people, skills—have to be really finely honed, as a principal.*

The Incompetent Teacher

Using people skills is absolutely necessary when documenting an incompetent teacher. Two of the group members had recently completed a session with a consultant who deals exclusively in this area. The ideas that came from the workshop were shared with the others: *You should be documenting, and keeping notes on everything. If you walk into a class and you don't see the teacher there, or you walk into the gym and the teacher's in the office, you must note it and date it. Because when you start to see three or four of these situations, then you have to sit the teacher down and refer to specific dates and instances. Because when that ATA rep comes in and says, "When was that? Do you have notes? You're not reading specific documentation" you don't have a hope if it isn't there.*

Teresa continued to share her understanding: *I specifically asked her [the consultant], "Where's the ATA in all this?" and her answer was, "Who's the ATA?"* Bob joined in: *Legally, you can ask a teacher to do this, that, and the next thing and she showed us where it is in the ATA Manual that we can do this. We didn't know about that. We don't know our rights.* Teresa responded: *She also said you don't need* *to have an ATA representative present when we talk to teachers at risk.* Along the same vein of thought Bob offered this story: *One of my teachers came to me this morning and said, "I'd like to review those achievement exams," and I said, "Yes, you can review them, but I can't give you any of them until exam time." The teacher responded, "Well, the ATA says..." I said, "Who's the ATA? Here are the recommendations from Alberta Education. We will follow them. We don't follow what the ATA says."*

Just recently we invited our ATA representative to a principals' meeting and three or four principals got up and said, "You are not supporting us." These principals came up with specific examples of how they were shafted by the ATA when they had a teacher who was incompetent. In their words, "This is what you did to me."

Changing Roles

Listen to Michael, with Emily joining in, as he talks about how he approaches a delicate situation: *I was going to share, sometimes teachers—all of us—we all need to see things through the eyes of the children. I had a teacher last year that had used these beautiful stickers. I thought everybody had one of these on their report cards, but I found that*—Emily: *One kid got missed.* Michael: *—some didn't have them. And so I asked the question, "Tell me about these stickers," and the teacher said, "Those are all the children who know their multiplication tables." And I said, "And the rest don't get a sticker?" "No, they don't."* The teacher's final words clearly blocked further communication. But Michael, using a great deal of diplomacy, encouraged her to explain her teaching practice. As well, he shared his views with her about rewarding students. While they were seeking to make sense of this perceived discrepancy, hard feelings were introduced and they needed more time to resolve the situation. Michael, as a new principal, was sorely tested by this teacher's reaction. However, over time, the rift between them was closed and Michael's philosophy of rewarding children was openly declared and accepted.

Many times conversations like these come to a halt because the rough spots and discrepancies result in disturbing silence or refusal to continue and people divert their attention elsewhere, to a less painful place. In Michael's case, the story unfolded into a much longer conversation which eventually brought both of them to a place of trust and respect.

Margaret told a similar story: *Last year in my school I had a teacher whose twenty-five report cards were almost identical. In fact, many of the grades in the language arts were identical on them. So when we talked about it, I said, "How can you give out twenty-five report cards with exactly the same grades?" The teacher said, "You're the only one who would ever know that. Every parent would see his or her child's as different." It does show you where she was at, which was not very positive at all. So we talked about it, but not without anger and resentment at first. Later, we moved into some different conversations and informal professional development events because she said she wanted to learn more about how to teach reading. At the end of our year together, she asked for a transfer to another school and took a different grade. I had many misgivings about this person because she was not willing to engage in the conversations about change. However, it was difficult to share those intangible issues in a professional way with the new principal.*

Both these stories illustrated the difficulty principals often encounter trying to make sense of a situation while attempting to foster change. The responsibility the principal carries has not always been reflected in the stories of professional development and teacher evaluation. The ethical and moral position they must maintain as an advocate of children and programming has frequently been ignored. Principals are in a difficult position in that they must act in the students' best interest, yet maintaining the teacher's dignity. These dual roles do not always complement each other. As Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) have noted "Effective collaboration is not always easy." Even when establishing a level of trust and asking questions that draw out new ideas and further elaboration have become established practices, principals sometimes encounter resistance from teachers not willing to change. These teachers, perhaps, require a different approach.

Creating Dissonance for Growth

Bob was the next to describe how he sometimes starts a conversation in his school: *If you want to set off a whole bunch of teachers, just anger them sometimes. You get a lot more conversations occurring when there's a critical incident brought about by me. You have to have a critical incident, so it's management by enraging them. That's not the [right phrase], but that's the idea.* Emily added in, *yes, by creating crisis*. Bob continued with his explanation: *Do this every once in a while, and it gets lots of results really quickly. It's really interesting. You can move mountains in one day, you really can. This year we had an incident, one of my staff members was complaining in the staff room about special-needs kids. The person was complaining that they [the special needs students] can't do this and can't do that, and I didn't want* *to hear it. So I quite openly put down that staff member, which I never do in front of other people. But I quite openly did that. That generated a lot of emotion, and a lot of thought and constructive criticism about what caused the reaction in the first place–what teachers do with special needs kids in their classes. It was really interesting. When I look back on incidents–I have lots of incidents where a critical mass has arrived–some crisis has taken place, and then a great deal of work takes place as a result.* Emily contributed her thoughts*: But it shows our humanness, I think, too. It shows our humanness. Sometimes you are frustrated with something, and have gone away and said, "Oh, you'd think I'd know better." But yes, it does get attention. And they [the teachers] also know the frustration that's attached to it.* Bob came to the end of his story in this manner: *I think, as a result of the incident, that the teachers understood both sides of the story, but they also consciously thought more about their own work.* Emily: *You would do the same again?* Bob: *Consciously do it again. I'd bring them to task just like you do with kids; bring them to task, make them accountable.* Emily: *But it's hard to do, too.* Joan: *It's very hard to be honest with another adult in that way that you would more openly with a child. But with another adult, a peer, I have a hard time being angry or saying, "I really didn't like when you did this or that."*

Some people might describe what Bob did as border crashing, that is, purposely acting in the role of devil's advocate to get a rise out of people. By confronting teachers to examine their practice and pushing the edges of their beliefs and values, he was attempting to break down some long-held assumptions. His approach, he openly admitted is effective when used sparingly. Because it creates such dissonance and positive disintegration among staff, there is always damage control to be done as a result. However, it is allowable, in the eyes of these principals, when there is an urgent need to create a crisis for change.

Paul, a principal in a junior-senior high school, described how he and his assistant principal influence their teachers: *Report cards are very present in our life right now too. We go through every one, partly because the computerized report card is not very personal, but also, because it fits the framework of what we're doing in other ways. We're looking for everything. If a kid makes a ten-percent increase and there's no comment there to say "Good going!" then that report card goes back to the responsible teacher. We spend a lot of time checking those things. I had a teacher give a zero to a student for health. My question was "How do you get zero in health?" "Well, she didn't hand anything in." My second question was: "And the parents didn't know?" "Well, I haven't phoned them yet." The rule in our school is no surprises. This is a new teacher who hasn't taken the "no surprises" seriously.* Paul continued: *We're talking about being concerned about getting to people. I think when I first started as principal, I was very cautious. "How far do I go?" Am I comfortable with calling in people and saying, "Here's what I see, and here's how it's got to be. What do you think?" I'm past the concern that I'm going to be stepping on somebody else's toes. In the end, it is the kids that you're helping, so I'm up front with people. We're [the assistant principal and the principal] not nasty, we do it in a kind way. If it's good for kids we're going to do it, and if we hurt a teacher now and then along the way, we believe it's okay because they'll come back when* *they understand us. It's taken us a long time to get to that relationship. We're often called Mom and Pop because we sort of do this mother-father thing.*

Paul's comments have an important direction for our work with teachers. There is a clear need to describe and live out the expectations principals have for teachers. Asking inquiring questions is a way of leading and invites both positive and negative responses. Sometimes, however, the messages may be too harsh for hearing and misunderstanding is created. While much has been said about the poor treatment of teachers by principals, very little research speaks about the principal's role in ensuring that a teacher is censured for an unethical approach. Principals are caught in somewhat of a dilemma. Their personal code of ethics using dignity, respect, and care in a professional context, must be upheld yet they must take professional action based on student needs. Posing difficult questions such as Paul did above, causes conflict for many principals yet is recognised as a critical element in the growth and development of teachers.

Listen to Teresa as she describes a similar situation that ended more positively: *I read a class set, probably twenty-six report cards the other day, and I noticed that at the end the teacher wrote an affirming comment to every child, but there were three where she didn't. I thought, did she do that for a reason? Did she just overlook it? What happened? So I wrote her a note saying, "I noticed that you did all these comments. Did you also mean to include these ones?" And she came back and said, "I don't know what I was thinking." One of them [the excluded students] is a discipline problem, and I think it would have helped to have something affirming there. So I question, because it causes the teachers to reflect on their practice.* Teresa's subtle inquiry opened the conversation with her teacher in a safe place on the landscape. What could have resulted in a border became a crossroad, and all persons were honoured.

Timing is Everything

Listen to Teresa once more as she relates another significant story: *I've got a teacher right now that two parents have come and complained they've heard comments from the hallway. (Their kids aren't even in the class; their kids are in the class across the hall.) They don't like what they're hearing. As you know, this is report card week. I'm not going to go and upset the teacher this week. I am going to choose. And, in truth, nobody's going to die this week over what those parents told me. But I know this teacher well enough to know that if I deal with this issue this week, no matter how low key I am, she'll be stressed to the max. I'm going to stress her, and she's going to be gathering the support of her colleagues, so she's going to have them stressed.*

I will always deal with things, but I deal with them using a very low-key approach. As Ernest Hemingway said "Courage is grace under pressure" and that's how I feel. I really work hard to ensure that there's still something intact and that we can go on from there. And to me that has to have something to do with their growth and my growth, that we can get beyond it, no matter what.

Teresa's efforts, in the last two stories, to elicit deep, lasting change, also mean taking a risk in doing so. But it is these inquiring questions that make a school community a self-renewing entity. Sensitivity, timing, careful questioning, responding and affirming–all help build a sustaining culture of continuous growth and renewal. Ensuring that there is "still something left intact" is a critical part of the process. Without questioning, shared decision-making and planning, sharing experiences and resources, deep and lasting school improvement cannot occur (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p. 57). Conversations of change in teaching are not always positive for the teacher. If they can be focused on what is best for students, simultaneously weighing the teacher's dignity and worth, they may make a difference. It can be a delicate balancing act for everyone involved.

Agreeing to Disagree

In this group of principals there were two quite different views on report cards and the possibilities they might present for leading a learning conversation with staff. Most group members saw the student reporting discussion with teachers as an excellent opportunity to talk about teaching. Emily, with Michael in agreement, took that perspective: *I see it from a discussion point of view.* Teresa added her view: *In terms of both the point of views of the students and of the teachers, I like to read report cards. Thus, no surprises! Sometimes teachers will unwittingly write a comment that has a negative tone to it, and so I want to talk about that ahead of time. But I also want to have a global view, generally, of how classes and students are doing, and it gives me an insight into how the teachers are seeing kids.*

However, one principal, Joan, was alone in regarding student reporting only as a professional obligation, one in which she was not going to interfere. In her words: *If they ask me I'll read them [the report cards], but I figure that they're professional and should be able to do that on their own.* In clarifying her stance further, Joan added: *We have administrator-teacher meetings for that purpose before report cards go out. We have two or three weeks of conversations about every single child and their progress. We have notes on them taken by the vice-principal, and she becomes the key for all the* *information. But I only read the report cards that teachers ask me to read, or if they say, "Have I said this well enough? I'm a little leery about this. I want to say this, and I'm not sure it's clear, or I'm not sure it's positive," and then I'll give them feedback if they request it.*

This understanding of report cards was not common to anyone else in the group. Joan defended her position and argued that it would be impossible for her to view all four hundred and thirty-eight cards. *It's their [the teachers'] job to do a really good job. I feel the administrator-teacher meetings we hold ahead, do that kind of conversation. It probably takes longer, but each teacher comes with their portfolios and their test results. We spread it on the table, and we go through each child and say, "Where's he been?"* Michael: *So you're doing it a different way.* Emily: *Yes, we're just doing it in a different way.*

Making meaning is always an opportunity to hear others' realities and accept or reject them. Listen in as Joan moves in her understanding: *I have four hundred and thirty-eight kids. How long would it take me to write comments for those?* Emily: *It takes you about an hour a classroom.* Joan: *An hour a classroom. That's a lot.* Emily: *In the same way that you have your administrator-teacher meetings, we read our report cards. It's not that I don't trust the staff. I do see it as my role as principal but I do see it as collaborative.* Joan responded dubiously: *But I'm wondering how much they see the administrator-teacher meetings as a collaborative or more a performance kind of thing. Or "Are they checking up on me when they read every report card?" I hope they think it's collaborative*... Joan's movement to consider another approach was evident.

While her tone of voice expressed some uncertainty, she continued questioning and explaining the way she was currently addressing this work.

This conversation marked the first time the group had disagreed openly. There were strong expressions from both points of view yet neither was upheld as better. By the end of our conversation, a revealing moment occurred. What had started out as a border was becoming more of a crossroad. Grappling with how we approach student reporting was calling into question some of our practices, and our empathy for one other was evident. In a knowledge community, listening is unconditional and people feel free to share their ideas openly and authentically. Now listen to the conversation as the group began to process the events of the past three hours spent together. Joan began quietly: *I was just thinking back to what we did today, the question thing. To me that reflection on professional practice, for example and how it happens, are themes. If I'm concerned about professional growth on my staff, what have we learned from talking to each other?*

Teresa joined her: *It does make you really look harder at what you believe and what you're doing, and that to me I haven't had enough time to do that. I'm so busy in practice doing that I never really stop to ask those questions. So I think sometimes we have to stop and read. Maybe we have to just force ourselves to get those questions to ourselves*. Michael added his thoughts: I *think going through those report cards, not only for the teachers but for me, gives me things to work on. On the weekend I'm looking through these report cards, and I know it's like all these kids, forty-three absences and fifty-two absences, and I thought, Now, what am I doing? What are we doing?*

Crossing Over

We had begun our third session together admittedly tired and somewhat uninspired. There had even been disagreement between members about reporting practices. Now as we reflected on our conversation, we tried to make sense of some of the discrepancies. Joan: *It's so rare for a group of peers to sit and to talk about our practice and to say, "You guys read all the report cards." And I think, "Maybe I should, but I don't think I will, because I think you're ..."* Emily added with glee: *I saw that little light go on!* Joan: *A little light did go on, but thinking about four hundred and thirty-eight comments, it went out!* Emily responded: *Maybe next year!* Joan: *We don't often get to reflect on and challenge our way of doing things. I want to say that one of my things about not officially reading report cards unless the teacher requests it is that there is a level of trust. We do have administrator-teacher meetings where we go over everything. We've got a setting for it to be well thought out, because I've never come across anyone who wrote the same comment over twenty-two; never ever seen that.* Teresa: *I know in our case that I make that very clear why we do that, so I think that's part of almost like sharing your vision. There are certain things that we do, and this is why we do them. And I can remember the first time talking about that to somebody new and saying that "It's not Big Brother watching. There are some good reasons for doing this."*

And so we closed with a deeper understanding and a felt commitment to one another. We were moving away from the borders to a place of crossing over. In trying to be in conversation with one another, we attempted to make sense of issues full of inconsistency. But slowly, with care and sensitivity, we had begun sorting out our own understandings and deepening our stories of how and why we practice the way we do. In this conversation, we had come perilously close to a border from which some of us may not have retreated. Our conversations could have ended at that place, with its discrepancies, and never have been taken up again. Instead we travelled to a place where we could agree and accept each other's realities. Our conversations took us to place where we crossed over allowing each of us to come to a sense of meaning that was acceptable yet still maintain our dignity and professional respect for one another. Is this not our aim with teachers? Can we be any different if we too are learners? The spirit of renewal at the end of the session was tangible and our sentiments resonated with those of Maxine Greene:

> Some say that encounters with ... stories enable us to recapture a lost spontaneity. Breaking through the frames of presuppositions and conventions, we are enabled to recapture the processes of our becoming. Made aware of ourselves as questioners, as meaning makers, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us, we may communicate the notion that reality is multiple perspectives, and that the construction of it is never complete, that there is always more. (1995, p. 130)

As we joyfully said our goodbyes, we hastened to commit our next date into already full calendars: Tuesday, April 8th–pencilled in–the first of our visits to one another's schools!

Chapter Four

Around the age of six or seven, children develop a great need to learn by doing, to make their mark on a community outside the home. If the setting is right, these needs lead children directly to basic skills and habits of learning. (Alexander, Isikawa, Silverstein, 1977)

The Road Ahead!

Our journey as a group of educational pilgrims had begun. We had agreed to visit each of our schools, committing ourselves at a deeper level to knowing one another. Less virtual, more real, this journey presented our greatest risk to date. Why? Because in those places where we work, where we engage more personally, our cover stories are revealed. The schools in which we lead embody a physical representation of that which we passionately speak. They are a metaphor of our personal beliefs and values in education. Like a book cover, they provide, in true "cover story" fashion, a picture of the school's reality. Telling their tales of leadership, enigmatic and esoteric, through signs, slogans, and symbolic actions, school stories are narrated in the deeds, expressions, and confirmations of the persons within. Each school, a different place with a different dynamic, represents a place of human being, human doing, and human-ness. Their patterns highlight the common places and attributes that make such structures more than just functional. They are an integral part of the whole. *To me, the tours really center who you are, because they tell a lot about you. For that reason these stories need to be told so that you and your schools are integrated into the whole story.*

The principals were the key "storytellers" in each of the visits. They introduced us to their schools and to the hopes and dreams they have for children and staff in these places. Their stories are told in the order that our journeys to visit them unfolded. Bob, Paul, Teresa, Amber and Emily were our hosts in the winter and spring of 1997. Joan, Michael, and Helen hosted us in the winter of 1997-98.

During our visits we continued our conversations on issues that arose as we moved about the landscape of each place. In what follows, the conversations form a part of our developing story of how principals can enable the growth of teachers. While all the visits were a memorable, one visit stands out from the rest. Amber's school, over 200 km away, provided a perfect excuse for a fieldtrip. Seven of the group visited her school and town on a Friday afternoon and stayed overnight in her home. The distance as well as our enthusiasm to spend more time together resulted in this overnight commitment, a professional development pyjama party, so to speak. Affectionately nicknamed "Rocky Mountain High," partly due to our location and the fun we had together, this lengthy session afforded us many extra hours to talk and share ideas in the vehicle, at dinner, and later in the hot tub! Some of this extended conversation is shared in Chapter Six.

So, in the words of one group member, *Life is a journey, let the journey begin!*

Bob

Bob's school sits off a busy avenue in the north east part of the city. A one-story brick building with simple landscaping and parking on the side, it was named after one of the early bush pilots that helped open up the northern Canadian wilderness. The school proudly displays a replica of an airplane from that era as well as other memorabilia.

As I entered the building from the side parking area, I was struck by the sense of calm and studiousness. Students at the junior high level appeared to be happily engaged in their studies. Bob is clear about why the school has that feeling. *We are very clear with students about our expectations. I am also a principal who moves around the school and talks to kids. They know we care for them and respect them but we mean business when it comes to learning.* When classes change, there is the typical crowd of students rushing in the halls. But there also seemed to be a strong feeling tone of caring and respect. Bob himself is constantly speaking to students, giving them a pat on the back or generally joking with them. The teachers also appeared to have good rapport with the students–it seemed a friendly respectful place to be.

When Bob spoke about his school, he was enthusiastic and candid: *To me the school is the children and the staff, not the physical building. I can't help but use the term "relationships" because a school is built on relationships, formed and re-formed daily. A school is a jumping-off point to learning and the push, or impetus, is provided by the teachers. The students are the critical responding agents in that learning.*

My hope for the school—the staff, students, and the parents—is that effective modeling will yield life-long results. Our thrust here at the school is a long-term rather than a short-term one. We want to make a difference for kids for life and sometimes they don't know what they have learned here until later in life. Our test or measuring stick is the authentic respect and dignity that we see daily. That's a hard thing to measure, but it's key!

As Bob proudly showed us about the classrooms and labs, and introduced us to many of his staff who were talking and meeting in various rooms, a second feature struck me. The school is filled with portraits of people. We all have an instinct to decorate our surroundings and Bob has followed his well. A wall of staff portraits, done professionally by a friend of the school, greeted visitors. Bob's office is filled with pictures of his wife and family, a tribute to the importance he places on his primary relationships. The junior high honor board took up a second wall beside the office. Names and pictures of all students achieving 80% or better were listed for each term and the board was full. The emphasis on people and their celebration was evident at Bob's school.

One of the many bulletin board displays at Bob's school

PERFECT
ATTENDANCE

Later we gathered in the staffroom for coffee and more talk about the role of principals. Our first school visit left us with many inspiring ideas and suggestions.

Teresa

Our second visit was to two schools close to each other. The first, Teresa's school, was an older brick building surrounded by trees. Previously considered one of the poorer schools in the district, both financially and academically, Teresa, with her staff and parents, have worked hard to change that reputation. As I entered the front door, the evidence of the school's Catholic origins immediately struck me. There was a special display with a sign saying "Be something special for someone else." This motto is upheld throughout the school between students, teachers, parents, and extends to their educational partner, an inner city school.

Teresa described her school in her own words: *I think of my school as warm and caring—the marrying of the school climate with academic excellence. The Catholicity and school climate, that whole idea together, is that these things have to be in place in order to bring about growth, learning, achievement on the part of the kids. Our school used to be seen as the poor country cousin where you're put out to pasture. That was the reputation it had when Paul and I went there, and we were brought there to try to change that. Now the school is noted for its provincial achievement results. We're as good as the schools in the upper-crust area of town; in some areas we're better, and yet we have many special-needs kids who are achieving that excellence even when they're writing [provincial achievement exams] with special provisions [that accommodate their learning disabilities].*

Teresa's school is approximately 15 years old but is well maintained and attractive. Based on a core plan with a library and gym at the center, the classrooms are on one floor surrounding them. The hallways are decorated with student work and seasonal displays. I arrived at the general office, which is open and friendly.

A peek into Teresa's office shows us that it is full! Papers, books, binders, and student's pictures cover the walls and table. Because she has recently been named principal of a new school to be opened in a year's time, Teresa is already busy working with architects and designers. A portfolio she developed for the application process is sitting on one corner of her table. It's an impressive effort, demonstrating the passion and energy with which she approaches all of her work. We head for the library where Teresa shows us a video about the school produced by a parent as a memorial for a student in the school. It is one of the highlights of our visit.

SCENES OF
THE ARCTIC

A classroom in Teresa's school

Teresa continued her school story: *I think it's the reality of Catholicity is very strong. I'm very committed to that. In order for kids to learn and to achieve best, they have to be in a certain kind of environment. We bring in all the encouragement, the caring, the risk taking, the valuing, the dignity, and all those things. I believe that the tone is set by the way the principal personally relates to the staff. I think there's a lot in that. These kinds of things: the celebration of student work, the importance of kids, the way we greet new people. I think it would be a rare day that anybody would walk down a hall and encounter a staff member, that the staff member didn't say hello. And over and over again people write on their reviews, "She [a teacher] didn't teach my kid, yet she still stops and talks to me". I think the school is a reflection of many beliefs.*

How did I make that happen? For me, I think it goes back to relationships, because when I went there I knew there was resistance, and I thought—I think it was instinctive for me—I've got to get to know people. I learned a lot from Paul. He has this line, "Go slow to move fast," and I think that my first year was spent establishing relationships and modeling. And I found in the year I became principal, my third year, I was able to talk quite openly, "If we have a problem, you know me now. You know that if we have something that I have to address, you know that it will be dealt with dignity, that we have to talk about these things, but it doesn't change the valuing of you, and tomorrow things will be okay." So I think in a way the school mirrors the principal. "Be someone special for someone else." It covers our Catholicity, it covers our school climate. It covers it all.

Paul

I followed Teresa's excellent directions to Paul's school, a few blocks west. Built about 6 years ago, the school houses junior and senior high French Immersion students. A contemporary and stylish building, it is painted and furnished in blues, grays, and light mauve. A huge foyer with vaulted ceilings, skylights and large windows serves as a gathering place for students and surrounds the front office. A busy place in this school of 300 students, the office is staffed with friendly, bilingual personnel.

The foyer and gathering place in Paul's school

As Paul described it: *I think if you were to walk into our school, the feeling tone is something that we hope hits everybody when they come in the door. Often persons from substitute teachers to parents to visitors talk about it, "It feels good when I walk in here." We have a feeling tone for the school that shows that it's a Catholic school. And that's not my doing, but who I am as leader helps keep that* *alive. We all have responsibility to make it part of what we do every day and how we interact with people. When you talk about stories, our school and front office is, hopefully, a place where people feel that care is being taken.*

Paul toured us around the classrooms and laboratories with state of the art technology and equipment. We were, collectively, in awe. It was a beautiful building and every principal's dream. Heading back to the administrative area, we paused in Paul's office. A large, circular room, it was equipped with a state-of-the-art laptop computer and modern furniture. Clean lines and minimum accessories are a hallmark.

Our group made our way to the staffroom, another large open room, where a light supper was served, courtesy of the school cafeteria. We broke bread and continued to talk together for several more hours.

Amber

Visiting Amber's school, approximately 200 km away, meant leaving the city at noon and gave us a chance to ride together in Teresa's van. A researcher's dream, the captive audience: Emily, Michael, Teresa, Margaret, and Bob were off on an adventure!

We had planned to arrive at Amber's school in time to see the school in action and almost didn't make it! (Bob, the former bus driver, was in charge!) When we arrived, shortly after 3:00 PM, however, there were pairs of students eagerly waiting to greet each of us and host our tour of the building.

Amber's school is about 8 years old and serves 350 students from Kindergarten to Grade Six. The office, open and decorated with student work, is a welcoming place. Behind the office, in the staff room, we met several teachers and the school counselor who were most helpful in describing the school and showing us their unique resources. Another modern building, Amber's school is attractive with skylights and children's work everywhere. A constant bustle of learning was evident, as students moved from the music room to the library to the computer labs, full of new equipment.

A computer room at Amber's school

Following the tour of Amber's school, made more charming by our bright student guides, we traveled across town to another "lighthouse" school. Built on the site of the former school after it burned down, this school is a tribute to the province's education budget during a wealthier time. Featuring sweeping ceilings, wood paneling, huge laboratories, and a wing filled with snakes and lizards devoted to natural science, it is a must see for any educator.

Amber described her school and its life in this way: *"Dare to Discover" was our motto, which while wonderful, wasn't talked a lot about. We did a lot of discovering and "Dare to Discover" would certainly sum up the three years that I was there. We spent the first year being cautious and careful and afraid. But the* *school had its own life that kept everybody going. And now in looking back I can see that what was really happening, where our school needed to open up was how we thought about teaching and learning. There were little pockets of discovery happening underground, but I don't think they felt supported, so they would do it in their own ways. There were a lot of those little pockets, so I thought if we could come together, then we could really explode. So technology became that catalyst for us, because we had the money, and we had a couple of people on staff for whom this had been an absolute passion. Then we had a change in leadership, so we really started moving in terms of teaching, learning, and teaching and learning together. There were a couple of people who didn't want to be on this journey, and there's not a lot you can do about that. But as a group we started meeting and doing some really fun things. We called ourselves the "Step Forward Group." You know how frustrating it is: you move two steps forward and five steps back in terms of your learning about working with children with new tools. So we met regularly, and got together a really neat school plan. It was our technology plan, but, of course, it was also our school plan. It was also much more than just computers and gigabytes and all that nonsense. It was, rather, about what our children are going to do and how they are going to make connections with other people and themselves in their own learning. We opened up our library to become a center for these kinds of things to happen.*

After two intensive school visits, we left exhausted from the travel and thirsty from talking so much. Making our way to the local Asian restaurant for a buffet dinner, no one could get a word in! Shortly after we had eaten, we set out for

Amber's home and our overnight retreat. The rest of this story is found in chapter five.

Emily

Our last visit for 1997 was at Emily's school. Built in the past five years, this school is situated in an upper socio-economic area of the city. It is a round structure with attractive landscaping and many windows. When I first entered the school, the warm atmosphere immediately attracted me. The library stretched before me, open to the rest of the school and the school's gathering place. In every corner and free space, there are children's books, interesting displays, and wonderful artful exhibits. Teachers and students alike move about, working on computers, reading in pairs or working on projects.

To the left is the general office and administrative area. Emily's office is a studied balance between privacy and connection. While not totally private, which would interfere with her open communication style, Emily's office is a gathering place with a

A corner in Emily's office

common area and a place to drop in and stay for a minute. Full of interesting collectibles and framed sayings on the wall, this room expresses Emily's care and love for children and learning. There is little evidence of the serious administrative duties she must engage in with a school of 350 children! According to Emily, she has an effective filing and mail system that moves paper quickly out of view.

Emily's describes her school and staff in these words: *This year I have such a tremendous feeling we have come so far as a staff. The school has a strong sense of community. We are part of a circle as a school and each person has chosen a story thread. There all different kinds of threads. And in sharing we created the circle, the idea of people working together, a caring community. The staff here really supports and contributes to creating a good place for everybody. Our focus on "Children first" has evolved and there's a strong sense of putting children first.*

The school does reflect the beliefs and values I've always held true in what I think a school should be. People are appreciated here. People are competent here. It's a good place. The culture–kinds of rituals–helps create that. Yesterday we had the anniversary of our Christmas mouse. It's a joke because one of our teachers killed a mouse in the school this time last year. So we put out little books on the mouse and have cheese to eat. That's the spirit here. You can have fun, which really does come to what I believe a school should be. I'm lucky to be here!

As we toured Emily's school, we were struck by the beautiful student art, impressive computer room, and open, democratic design of classroom spaces for learning. An inviting place to learn!

Joan

The new school year had begun and we were eager to see each other and catch up on the news. We met at Joan's school on the last day of September. The staff room was full of laughter and greetings as everyone reconnected after the long summer.

Joan described her school this way*: I've been walking through this door for fourteen years, and I still don't mind it at all; I quite like it. I see children's work displayed on the hallway walls from the Grade 3 classroom, the gym doors, and the front cabinets that are decorated for the month. It's always something different. Then you see the front foyer, a large area. Every corner is round in that space; it's quite soothing. The office is right off the front foyer to your left as you walk through that front door. And you see two long hallways snaking around the library, which is the center of our building. You go to the birthday board on one side, and all the children make sure their names are on the birthday board when it's their turn. The parent board and their volunteer corner are on the other side. You can see through to both sides, into the office area or into the library through the windows. There are lots of things on the wall that kids have made. The [classroom] doors are usually open when people are teaching. It's rare the doors are closed, unless the teachers are doing something rather loud. So you usually hear a little hum.*

Joan's school is older and in a small town south of the city. It is situated on a ring road and was easy for me to find. As I entered the building I saw a large display cabinet with glass doors which teachers decorate month to month. At this time of year there is a harvest Thanksgiving scene. The office is to the right and is large and open. An old-fashioned child's desk with a teddy bear sitting in it graces the corner. I immediately felt at ease in the space as a series of welcoming things greeted me. Chairs, posters, and plants open the office and make visitors feel welcome.

Joan's office is large and has a comfortable sofa and coffee table. She is using her computer and checking her e-mail when I arrive. Her desk is positioned to one side and it's evident that she prefers this invitational look. Down an interior hall from her office are the other administrative areas: assistant principal's office, general office, and staffroom. The staffroom is large and cluttered with teacher's coffee cups and papers.

I tend to walk through the school about nine-fifteen, when everything else is calm and we've officially started the day. We start the day with music, a morning meditation—it could be a poem or a prayer—people's birthdays, special intentions, announcements, and then the day begins. It doesn't begin until I pray. I pray at a microphone, but I assume other people are praying and thinking or listening and saying, "Oh, that means something to me today. It moves me." And sometimes they tell me, and that's great. But after that I generally take a walk around the building, and it's usually very quietly humming. The voices in the rooms are fairly quiet; people are busy. And if I poke my head around, they barely notice that I'm there; it just continues.

There are two attached portable areas, four portables to the south side and four portables to the west side, and they're attached off the square of ten classrooms. Then I walk back after I've walked the hallways and listened. Mostly I just listen, and then I go back to my office and open up my e-mail. Then my administrative day begins until I have to teach in the Grade Three classroom. It's a really nice time of the day, first

The playground behind Joan's school

thing in the morning. I quite like it.

Joan continued her description: *Some images have grown in their symbolism and their intensity. One of them is the image of the sun and the flowers that is in the building in different ways, and it was our first motto; it was sort of, "Nous fleurison assemble," "We grow together" or "We bloom together." And as we use those symbols more and more through our conversation about how we are and who we are. You can't change them [the symbols]. I tried updating them once, just wanting to change the way they look on our school letterhead and paper, and I realized how attached people were to the symbols. They had to be recognizable to those who put all their meaning into it, so we didn't change them much. But they express, I think, the warmth and the caring and the need for all of us to grow, that we're all part of this growth process and this learning process. And I do think that that's something that we live and relive and rethink and redo.*

There's a part of me that needs that tidiness and part of me that respects other people's way of doing it. So there's always a little bit of give and take on that one. But I find the school a very warm place to be; it feels warm and earthy and *comforting. In terms of warmth, I think they [the community and staff] think I'm sloppy and a little bit of a warm person, someone who can laugh easily but also cries as easily as I laugh.* After sharing a glass of wine and raising our blood sugar with crackers and cheese, the group gathered at a local restaurant and conversed well into the evening.

Michael

It was November when we met again for the second time of the 1997-98 school year, this time at Michael's school. He invited the group members to visit his small but cosy school, an older building tucked between huge high-rises in the inner city. I was met by a wonderful display of children's work and attractive home-like touches at the front entrance. The general office is located behind doors on the left of the entrance. Somewhat forbidding at first look, when I opened the door, it was a whole new world! The space is open and friendly, filled with children's art and interesting books. The room is both peaceful and positive. To each side of the main room are the administrators' offices, again comfortable and welcoming, full of interesting things for children and adults alike. Fashioned in the days when schools were designed with straight halls and classrooms on each side, this school is remarkably attractive. It was spotless and, as we were introduced to the person responsible, it was obvious there was warmth between him and Michael. We walked about the empty classrooms that seemed deceptively alive because of the many art projects and pieces of student writing.

The hot-lunch kitchen and the facilities for daily breakfast service and a clothing exchange are compelling evidence that this is an economically poor community. Each day two meals are prepared in these rooms so that the children of the school are able to learn on full stomachs. Michael explained the necessity of this, *"If we didn't feed the kids, some wouldn't come to school and many others couldn't cope with their school work."*

Michael described his school this way: The school motto is "Learning For All." It is a very profound statement as it encompasses our multi-cultural perspectives in this school where we welcome children from all cultures. But it also demonstrates an understanding that many of our children aren't as talented at learning. We have bright children as well as mentally handicapped children but they're all part of the learning that happens here.

Some key words or phrases that come to mind when I think of the school – "Children First," and "Love Spoken Here." I'm really pleased that they're not just

A poster in Michael's school

words on a wall–they are actions that happen. It's children, its community that makes this a place where children want to attend, families want to come and gather to celebrate learning. It's also a place where families can come for support for their children and the staff try to provide to the best of our abilities.

After viewing the school, we made our way back to the staffroom and enjoyed snacks and drinks. The whole group then left for a local Italian restaurant for yet more conversation.

Helen

Last on our list of visitations, Helen's school sits back from the street in a wealthy suburb of Edmonton. It is a large brick building approximately 25 years old. Built in the days of open area instructional approaches, Helen's school has since been renovated so that there are now a series of small rooms off the main library. It also has two pods of portable classrooms to meet the needs of the 270 children attending in K-Grade 6. .

In Helen's words: *My rule of thumb is, I would like the school I work in to be a place that I would want my own children to come to. So I would be very pleased to have my children here. And I think it's because people are working together for the good of the kids and for learning, and it's a supportive atmosphere, but challenging at the same time for them in their learning. People here aren't afraid to have high expectations for children's learning, but they also know, if they are going to have high expectations, that also translates to high expectations of themselves to help the children meet those expectations. I think it's rigorous, but it's a healthy rigor.*

Helen is a great believer in developing her staff and working on their growth and commitment on an ongoing basis. She is not afraid to pose leading questions that startle people to re-think their long-held beliefs. Witness her words: *The first year I asked them to talk about what they had seen a colleague do that made a difference in a child's life. So they shared about each other, which was safe, because you're sharing with one another. That was really a poignant moment at our sharing in our last June time together.*

And then the next time we did that I said, "Now I'd like you to share something that you have done that made a difference in a child's life." And that was really hard. Some of them were crying, and others would say, "But I saw so-and-so do this." And so they needed to say, "Yes, I did make a difference in a child's life." But to go from talking about a colleague doing it to saying, "This is what I did"—was a huge leap.

As I walked around the school, I was struck by the evidence of children's literature and art. Everywhere there seemed to be books, stories, pictures, and student

The library in Helen's school

writing. Helen's office was another good example. Although she dislikes its dark atmosphere due to its inside location, Helen has made it cozy and welcoming by positioning books and art all about.

We spent a long time at Helen's school munching on crackers and cheese in the large, comfortable staff room. There was a good deal of news to be shared, as we had not been together for several months. Everyone had a story to tell and we talked late into the evening.

In Closing

Our school visits as described above provide a brief vignette of each school's reality. They cannot tell the whole story but they do present a compelling metaphor for the leadership within. Often pictured as just spaces, schools are much more than that. They form the subjective in-between, often saying more about us than we are willing or able to say.

There is clearly a school landscape that defines the beliefs and values inherent in the people who occupy its space. Schon (1992) first hypothesized that schools are generally organized around an epistemology. As we looked more deeply into the physical place of the school, we saw a continuum of how knowledge is viewed: received, expert, and hierarchical or constructed, communal, and shared. This continuum of epistemologies seems evident in every space called school. The landscape is physically storied by the semiotics present within it.

If the school is a reflection of its epistemology, where does that originate? When we looked back to the personal narratives of the principals whose schools we visited we recognized resonating themes. Recall Teresa's openness and candor as she began her journey with technology. *I had very little interest in technology. In fact, I always have had an aversion to any kind of machine, and when I came to technology, I would say that the expression, "scared stiff" (from swimming lessons) was apt. In our elementary school, we weren't ready for the call for teachers to both implement and integrate technology with the curriculum.! How would I lead in an area where I felt such a lack of skill and confidence? I decided to "go public" with the staff and "bare my soul."* Teresa exemplified what the landscape of her school demonstrates: a freedom from fearfulness, and a safe environment to experiment. There is no sense of competition between stories on this landscape: the surface story is also the secret story.

Emily provides another look at how principals express their stories through the physical landscape of their schools. In her own words, Emily comments: *The school has a strong sense of community. We started with a circle on the wall and each person chose a story thread. There all different kinds of threads, and in sharing the idea of people working together, we created a circle. There is a strong sense of community in the school. It really is a caring community where the staff really supports and contributes to creating a good place for every body. Our focus on "children first" has evolved and there's a strong sense of putting children first.* Emily is fully aware of the importance of the school landscape in helping her to fulfill her goals of community and sharing. She continually speaks about the impact of this on her work: *The school does reflect the beliefs and values I've always held true in what I think a school should be. People are appreciated here. People are competent here. It's a good place. The culture–kinds of rituals–helps create that.*

Bob said it another way: *It is a question of that opening yourself up kind of, showing who you are in your work? Because you can tell a story; that may not be in fact the story when you see a person in practice. I found that people's stories matched very much, very much so. Some of our visits you were less able to see that because you weren't able to see the school with the staff and students there, but you could tell.*

School stories are told over and over again in the words of principals. They repeat and embellish their beliefs about education and children through the physical representations at the school level. As we visited each school, the underlying belief system was obvious. The governance of the school and the rights of the people involved there were represented in how accessible the principals were, how their front offices were organized, how receptive adults were to our gaze, and how democratically all persons were treated. Symbolically, these same themes presented themselves in invitational signage, open welcoming offices and rooms, displays of children's work, and professional responses to our questions.

The issue of identity is a critical one when we look into schools and try to assess what they symbolically represent. Helen said it all when she stated: *I would like the school I work in to be a place that I would want my own children to come to. So I would be very pleased to have my children here. And I think it's because people are working together for the good of the kids and for learning. It's a supportive atmosphere, but challenging at the same time for them in their learning.* Teresa described it differently: *I think my leading is generally subtle, but what I hear people saying now about our school, which becomes the metaphor for my leadership, is that the things that I value are definitely the things that are happening. The way other* *people describe the school, those characteristics are the things that I would want to emulate; those are the things that I strive for.*

Principals as a group are known to be strong-minded, but there is always uncertainty, ambiguity, and vulnerability in their lives. The places where these people work must be secure havens, a place where they can be themselves. Beliefs, doubts, and differences are played out on this landscape, where support is given and taken. Listen to Amber as she talks about her school's journey: *We spent the first year being cautious and careful and afraid. But the school had its own life that kept everybody going. And now in looking back I can see that what was really happening, where our school needed to open up was how we thought about teaching and learning. There were little pockets of discovery happening underground, but I don't think they [the staff] felt supported, so they would do it in their own ways. There were a lot of those little pockets, so I thought if we could come together, then we could really explode.* No one can stand hard in certainty, suppressing disturbances. Problems must become our friends.

The school visits also brought home the importance of circulating the good news and sharing ideas. We acknowledged how we had grown as a result of looking in and questioning one another. We recognized the same would be true in our schools and mentally gave ourselves permission to become less protective and more open with the people with whom we work and play. By taking on the important role of storytellers, we were able to tell and re-tell others about what our colleagues were doing and what we were trying to do. We embodied in words and examples what we believed and valued.

Our stories of these spaces provide a construction of what it means to teach and learn. The physical representation of space and objects, their dominance on the landscape, our positioning of ourselves on the landscape all tell an important part of our leadership story. What we tell others about our schools ultimately defines the story we live. Our schools reflect the coherent model of our hopes and dreams, wishes and beliefs. Like windows on two sides of a room, schools have obvious architectural values that every educator and even most outsiders can recognize. The leadership within symbolizes a central, gathering place that anchors the heart of any home, as it does a school. The entrance that welcomes and invites people to come into our beliefs and enjoy, to take a risk and learn with us. Disparate entities are made more cohesive with color, photographs, and portraits, both visual and written. Schools are not a separate place on the landscape of learning. They are an integral part of the whole picture of identity, relationships, and represent an embodiment of the symbolic in-between.

Chapter Five

Journeys

Journeys, travelling from one place to another. The frantic pace of our lives interrupted by tranquil moments. Moments of listening and reflective silence. In the spaces between the words, feelings fly out and tell the real story.

We had journeyed together for several months both in conversation and in person. Some of our journeys included everyone, some we journeyed alone. This particular one was solo, a maiden voyage, figuratively speaking. So far, it had progressed favorably. One round of questions had been asked and the first hour was up. A sense of urgency, almost eagerness, had come over the candidate. She was nervous but ready, poised to elaborate, add another phrase or explanation. The urge to issue words and ideas was never stronger. Then came a question from one of the examiners, not yet considered. In all the hours of writing, talking, and thinking, this one had never crossed her mind. An innocent question but with alarming consequences. Margaret was struck by it, not so much afraid that she had no answer, but fearful of what the answer might be and where it would take her. *"What you have to give me are some words that will travel on paper to convey better than our existing words what you can do with your whole being. We have to struggle to find the words that will stand on their own on paper, that will say something. Maybe your thesis should be a videotape not a paper… Is there a lexicon for principals that would actually put into words what it is that you need to say to accomplish those kinds of ends?"*

Not usually short for words, Margaret was slow to respond. She admitted she had never thought of it that way. The examiner, not expecting any difficulty, had posed it innocently enough. It gave pause and more. The question stayed with the candidate and haunted many a conversation in the days and weeks ahead. It endlessly rode along in her thoughts as Margaret listened to the thousands of words of the research group and wondered, "*A lexicon? That is going to be very difficult. I think words are only words, that, in fact, the embodiment of them is most important.*"

Unanswered, even as Margaret began to synthesise the many transcripts and taped conversations, finally, the answer began to come clear. The need to tell stories is so elemental that a new language would be foreign. The words used ahead to describe the daily journeys of principals and teachers were words of everyday use. They flowed out of momentary thoughts and daily practices, merging into conversational journeys. Common phrases and words were repeated again and again, the voices were clear, and confident, and resonated with care and balance.

Perhaps what was signalled by the question was a deeper, more conceptually difficult idea? Is there a difference between the words we use when we speak about what we know we do and those we use when we describe what we know we *must* do? Clearly, as we have encountered earlier in this research, the professional knowledge landscape is not a level one. The theory-practice dilemma–an epistemological minefield–is a constant challenge. While much has been written about this in relation to teachers, is there as coherent an explanation for principals?

In the stories and conversations ahead, the effects of the sacred story of policy implementation are narrated. Called upon by the Minister to change our practice in teacher evaluation, as a group of principals, we were struggling with the change. From a past position on the landscape as observers and objective judges, we were now expected to be colleagues and facilitators. Where we once filled out checklists and inventories on teachers' skills and methods, we were now challenged to construct professional growth plans and portfolios with teachers.

Some of the dilemmas inherent in a philosophical change such as this are recounted ahead in the principal's stories. In trying their best to accommodate the change and to communicate with one another in seeking meaning, they shared their inspired first efforts. While these efforts did not lead to a definitive answer, they offered an orientation that made sense, and helped us gain a deeper understanding. Over the period of time that we spent together, each of us, in turn, was moved to talk. Did a new and different lexicon emerge? You decide.

Stepping into the Gap

How are principals going to be able to say what they need to say and have the conversations they need to have? What are the words you need in order to live out what you believe about teaching and learning? How do you actually say *it?* Margaret and the group struggled with this question. Helen began bravely: *We don't have enough conversations about effort. We need to choose our conversations and go from there. The vocabulary is unreal. I almost feel like I'm listening to a computer salesman. But each culture, each district, has such a culture of language that I don't think I could work anywhere else!* Teresa joined in *We have our own lexicon, that's true. It's not so much a new vocabulary, like the acronyms for which our district is famous, as it is sometimes being aware of concepts to introduce. I just find the term empowerment so overused. I think if you want to encourage staff and professional growth, being aware that the language you use to promote and encourage growth is important.* Joan couldn't help herself: *I actually think there are too many new, great languages for all the things that we do. We don't have enough of just ordinary, everyday English conversations about what we do and what we want. You don't need new words; there are words.*

Margaret tried again: *But I'm talking more about language from a principal's perspective in working with teachers and encouraging them in a professional development growth plan. It's a kind of language, an enabling kind of language.* Teresa: *It's not so much new language as an awareness of what the language is that engenders trust, that engenders whatever it is we are trying to do.* Joan: *Yes, but what words engender trust? I think we're talking about what we're doing [in the group]; that's the difference right now, because I don't talk with my peers as much as I've talked here.*

Our discussion focused on the benefits the group perceived from meeting together to share common stories and solve problems. The general feeling was that this kind of approach was helpful to our work. *The group helped me to express myself and to reflect on a lot of things that I wouldn't necessarily do just because of the busy-ness of the day. It's not the kind of conversation I generally have with the teachers.*

The concerns related to word usage and vocabulary did not seem to emerge as a critical issue for these principals. Joan continued the conversation with a revealing comment: *You've got to know who I am and how I feel and what I pray for and what I cry about and what I laugh about. Some people can make divisions. They can say, "I bring my professional self, and I do my job, and then I go home and I'm the mommy, I'm the wife." But I'm whole wherever I am. I can't distinguish one place from the other. So there is part of me that can't make a separation. But that's why I have a sense that this group could do something like that. If I could turn around what we can learn here.*Emily: *It's true, there is a safety net here. Because if we look at our principals' meeting today and there's over a hundred of us sitting there, there are very few people who are going to stand up and reveal anything that's the least bit vulnerable about themselves in that arena. It's too hard, even though we all know each other. A few people will. As principals, we're so conscious of our status and how well we're doing and how others perceive us that we never want to lay open and say that we're vulnerable about anything. Principals rarely do. When we meet as principals, I can't think of ten times in twenty years where I've seen somebody really get up and blow it.* Joan continued: *There are more expectations and more neediness in other relationships than there is here. We come here because we want to be here,* *as opposed to needing to be here, having to be here or gaining something because I'm here.* Emily: *It's a small learning community.* Teresa joined in the conversation: *But I think my entire career this is what I've been searching for and missing at the same time. And I think that's what we have here. I bet if we took this group to three or four more people, it might not be the same. I think when we come here, because of the number as it is, it's small enough that everyone can speak, and it's big enough that if you're having a day that you don't choose to speak, that's alright too. So I think numbers affect time too, and the quality of the conversation.* Amber added her thoughts: *Interesting things are happening with people, the group dynamics, and the individuals: Where do you stand? And it's now always "I stand here" or "I stand here." Usually it wasn't; it was somewhere in between. But what's interesting is what comes up with these conversations. So I hope there's some way.* Emily finished Amber's thought: *That we can preserve that.* Joan: *But we haven't got to a point in this group we eventually get to in the others, is the level of sometimes where we'll be angry and upset with each other. We've not yet reached that level of comfort where we rack and rail at one another.*

Margaret: *We haven't had much storming.* Joan: *Not yet, because we haven't had enough time for this. But in many of the groups I have worked in, we often work to the level of hitting conflict but often we go around it with good manners and politeness and never deal with it. And that's why our groups never feel—like this group. We have had conflict, but we never worked all the way through it, so we never got to that level where we can grow.*

As in any meaning making community, much time is spent evoking the potential for trust in the environment (Lambert et al., 1995). We were no different. In order for us to deal with the difficult questions, we had to deal with the comfort level of one another. Often our conversations began at a level of trust building. Listen to Amber as she talks about her first meetings in the group: *I'm still pretty careful about what I say; I think principals always will be. I don't think it'll matter where you are or who you're with, you still think before you open your mouth. I do it less with this group than any other group now, which is very comforting and very nice.* The level of trust is critical to the on-going health and welfare of any group. Amber was working through her relationship in the group and her value among the more experienced members. As she further commented: *I wanted them to come to see the school [I'm principal at] because I'm really proud of it. I know the feeling there, and I knew that when they [the research principals] went there they'd feel really good too. So I thought, then maybe what I do and say would have more value.*

Although we've all talked about the importance of relationship in what we do, there's a whole other level in terms of this group. And when we get right down to it, it's boiling down to that, to the relationships we have with each other.

A meaning making community differentiates itself by the way group members articulate their own views, learn from one another and actively pursue inquiry and advocacy to find the "best argument" (Senge, 1990). The goal of such a group, from a constructivist perspective, is " to find the best understandings through a balance of paraphrasing, inquiring, and articulating ideas" (Lambert et al.). *I guess the glue of our whole group is our ability to share and work with ideas and problems on a human* *level. When Joan comes back and we haven't seen each other all summer, the first thing we say is "I've got this problem I've got to work with. Can we each—?" And she throws it out on the table, and away we go. I loved that; I thought that was so great. And then afterwards when we come back here, our first words are, "So how did it go, Joan? What did you end up doing?"* Our balance was found between discussion, solution- finding, and support.

In many ways we were modelling the practices and words we would ultimately use with our teachers. Using the "linguistics of leadership" (Lambert et al.), our group had committed to a public discourse. In doing so, a reciprocal relationship that enabled us to construct meaning and knowledge together flourished. Listen to Teresa talk about her experience in the group: *To be able to speak to a group of people who have common experiences, to hear how other people handle things, and to hear that you're not the only one handling issues, has been a real bonus.* Instead of ignoring the difficult or uncomfortable issues, we tried to understand, speak the unspeakable and reveal ourselves fully. *I'm really enjoying hearing the things Bob has to say, because I find some of his approaches are so different, that it's like giving you something to bounce off, because some of his approaches are quite—off the wall!*

Not only was it painful, we found it time-consuming. However, guided by Schon's work on the reflective practitioner and acknowledging work by Stacey (1992) with regards to managing ambiguity and the unknowable, we were prepared to help ourselves to create maps from which to act. Within our group, the continuous interaction among the people created a certain amount of coherence and self-organising (Stacey, 1992). Often what our conversations did help create were the boundaries that provide a field for the reciprocal processes of understanding and meaning making. Paul commented: *People were at different levels: different needs, very different needs. I think that we have one person that has a great need to—pat themself on the back. It's hard to explain. Very sensitive and caring, and yet at times not sure; the confidence isn't really there for them, and it's an interesting thing to see.* Then, as we continuously reflected, inquired, and summarised, we were more able to facilitate the construction of meaning among ourselves.

The lexicon of leaders in a professional development relationship bears examination. Our constructivist approach required enabling, connecting structures that ensured a level of trust. There had to be an environment of safety so that we could feel safe enough to "break set with old ideas" and develop a meaningful dialogue that would uncover difficult topics. For example in our group, Bob shared his perspective: *The learning that's happened through the dialogue, conversations, has really changed things, changed the way I think about situations and made me really rethink some of my practices.*

Kegan (1990) described our conversations aptly, "a fascinating lived conversation between equally responsible parties who care deeply about the outcomes of philosophical conflict because it has real implications for their own lives and the lives of their students" (p. 48).

Sacred Stories and Language

At an earlier place in this writing, I discussed the metaphor of the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). In a beautifully framed example, the authors describe theory as knowledge funneled down to the out of classroom place on the landscape as having the qualities of a sacred story. They used a conduit metaphor where ideas and thoughts are objectified, words contain ideas, and communication amounts to finding the right word or container and sending it down the conduit to the listener who removes the idea-object from the word-container (Johnson, 1987). This virtual splitting of theory from practice signals that the sacred story of the relationship between theory and practice is just that—hallowed, revered, ordained.

To put this into perspective, we reminded ourselves that the motivation for our research as a group of principals was the forthcoming change in the teacher evaluation policy from the top-down supervision of teachers' skills to a collegial facilitation of teachers' professional growth plans. We saw the policy as a "rhetoric of conclusions" (Schwab, 1983), and thus found it to be abstract and depersonalized. In our beginning meetings, our group of principals was not particularly knowledgeable about the forthcoming policy change. This is fairly typical in relation to policies being fed down the conduit to practitioners on the school landscape. Often, little explanation is given for the change and expectations for change are high. This policy change was no different. Principals, at one of their monthly administrative meetings, became aware of the change approximately two years before its expected implementation. Because it was a district policy issue, committees were set up to examine the draft policy and align handbooks and practices accordingly. The committees found that the policy anticipated significant changes. A complete shift in the understanding of and approach to teacher evaluation on the part of both principals and teachers was anticipated. No longer would principals be relying on a standard evaluation document with list of skills and descriptors used in the analysis of teaching. The new policy stated that teaching is professional decision-making and as such it is in the hands of teachers to account for their abilities. Very little guidance was given to those who were responsible for enacting it. As one principal put it: *The policy makers are adamant that the new approach is a departure from the former top-down evaluation methods. It is based on the professionalism of each teacher and the teacher's ability to make decisions in the context of his or her teaching.*

The draft policy document, *An Integrated Framework to Enhance the Quality of Teaching in Alberta* (1996), revealed the sacred story. Calling for a radical change in both teaching and administrative practices with regard to teacher evaluation and promoting a professional model of teaching as decision-making, implicit in the policy is that administrators and teachers believe that knowledge is constructed individually and that individuals are unique in their conceptualization of knowledge. An open, constructivist, and professional approach to teacher evaluation was expected in that the model encourages teachers to become constructors of their own knowledge.

The policy provided affirmation to principals and teachers who already engage in a process-oriented individualized approach aimed at professional growth. It suggested that the objectively rational view of teaching as "one size fits all" be replaced with a new view that provides for deeper explanation and understanding of everyday teaching practices and experiences.

The revised policy on teacher evaluation names teachers as professionals with the wisdom and the judgment to make decisions that are best for their students. But, it is a sacred story and as such, is detached from the day-to-day practice and realities of teachers and principals. It is at best a theoretical model with tremendous implications for improving the evaluation process. However, there have been few provisions for implementing the theory into practice. Implicit in the statement, that teachers in conjunction with principals will construct an annual professional development plan, is that both these groups know and understand what this means. There is no discussion about the importance of ensuring that just, equitable relationships exist. There is little evidence that the evaluation landscape has leveled and that the power for evaluation lies in the hands of the person making the professional development plan. There is no explanation to principals of best approaches, sample documents, or exemplary practices. While most principals can be generally relied upon to make change when it is imposed, this draft policy presented a challenge to each of us in our group. We weren't convinced of the value in the change nor were we convinced that we had the necessary skills to implement it in the spirit the document suggested. This was made apparent in our conversations and is evidenced in the stories ahead. However, these principals were willing to listen and learn, experiment and make the best of the situation. Let's listen in as our group began discussing the proposed changes to the evaluation of teachers.

Changes in Policy

Ninety-seven percent of teachers will go to professional growth. Within that ninety-seven percent, yes, we're going to have coasters and people who don't take this seriously. Through the supervision process you'll deal with a number of those. And then the three- percent that are major problems could end up in a summative process.

Teresa had recently attended a conference on changes to the provincial teacher evaluation policy. It was the first of its kind, even though the policy was to be implemented by September 1998. Her remarks were comments made by one of the speakers, a school principal involved in piloting the new policy. Everyone in our group was curious to understand and hear about the new process.

Teresa continued with her summary of the conference highlights: *There is a continuum that you follow [for the 3%], starting with a notice of remediation. One of the things they're really hoping is that new teachers [who are not competent] will be weeded out before they get certified, because they're really hoping to see things like boards of reference go down. They used the word negotiation a lot, that you want to negotiate with the teacher. Now, there's negotiation and there's negotiation. That [the latter] is similar to the term "forced collaboration." They say that it allows us to spend more time with the people we should be spending time with, and it encourages the talk of professional practice with the people.*

The word "negotiation" came up many times in the conversations we had on this topic. Tannen (1990) described negotiation as an enactment of our desire to minimise our status as expert. Yet, every human interaction, on some level, is a competition between status and connection. Either we are trying to gain a place in the eyes of another or we are trying to relate to another. According to Tannen (1990), some form of this competition occurs in all our human contacts.

The proposed changes in the policy are a departure from past practices. The old text of teacher evaluation was based on a bureaucratic deficit model. Teachers were viewed as needing repair and it was the principal's task to observe and make recommendations to affect this repair. Power and control of the events were in the hands of the observer. In today's knowledge-based era, the new reality–growth, autonomy, professionalism–holds the day. The new policy describes practices that are more congruent with a constructivist learning model, a personally constructed, professional model of teacher development that is grounded in relationships.

The Process

It took a year for them to establish a trust that the teacher growth plan was based on a competency model. (They said if you don't do that, you're not going to have buy-in.) They talked about the fact that if you want people to really grow, and if you want them to feel free to engage in reflective practice, then they have to be able to take risks and be able to try something new. And if it [the plan] bombs, it bombs without any repercussions. If we don't involve teachers in that consultative process at the beginning, they're going to feel that once more we're doing something to them, so that you have to get to that point where they understand and trust that this is for them.

The conference presenters were personnel from a rural district who had piloted the new evaluation policy and practices. As they described in detail the process and its advantages and disadvantages, certain issues emerged. We were struck by the length of time it took the pilot group to establish trust. As in past policy changes, teachers and principals alike wished "That this too shall pass." Words used such as "*You're not going to have buy-in,*" belied our collective sense of the importance of trust and connectedness. It sounded contrived and a negative. The phrase "*Once more we're doing something to them.*" indicated to us that very little had changed in practice. As we considered the use of language, we increasingly recognised its importance in portraying our beliefs, assumptions, and even actions.

We became more aware that the act of conversation itself involves particular linguistic moves that can deepen our understanding or stand in its way (Tannen, 1986).

The simple paraphrase can give weight to an idea; overlapping another's idea can add to its meaning and affirm a speaker, causing an issue to escalate; interrupting can cut short one's thinking and alter the power structure in the group. How long we pause after an idea is put forth, how we present a new issue, the kinds of questions we ask are all significant in understanding the dynamics of conversational language. As we listened and talked, our understanding of the importance of words, our discourse in professional development planning continued to evolve and become more sophisticated.

Much of our concern for language was still rooted in our inability to put into words the abstract notions of the change in teacher evaluation. The sacred story had been funnelled to us in procedural, depersonalised rhetoric. We were confounded by a predicament: whether to support what we knew was best for teachers and our school cultures or align ourselves with the expert view.

Teacher's Feelings

No one was quite ready to articulate his or her feelings aloud. The conversation moved to a slightly different place. Emily had been quiet up until now: *I'm wondering what teachers are feeling. We know what we feel. I think we need to talk about what teachers are feeling right now. It is probably very different than what they felt six or seven years ago. They're probably feeling the same way that we do now. And I wonder if we understand it as well as we did at one time. At one time we were all teachers, and we were all there, and we all had the same focus. Because now our focus is very different, their focus is very different, and you wonder if that same communication is there as neatly as before.* Nodding her head, Helen added, *and I don't know how often* *our conversations [with teachers] are genuinely started or force-fed because of a goal that we've just had to put down. While I really like going through the goal-setting process, I feel that often there are too many [goals] for us to really concentrate. Remember, as well, that we have children, in classes, in front of these teachers. So when you talk about teachers' role changing, I don't know if I could go into a classroom now and do what I expect my staff to do.* Helen's comment roused everyone and Emily added *That's my question. We don't worry, because I hear nobody's reading these growth plans anyway. I believe we're doing mounds and mounds of paperwork that nobody's reading. I really question it. There was a time when we focused on children and teaching and learning, and you worried about your classroom, and reading and writing. Now I find that everybody's doing everybody else's job. You've got teachers working with strategies and site-based management. Sometimes I think how far are we going from what's really meaningful?* Paul added thoughtfully: *How far are you being taken away from what you love to do?* Emily responded: *The ideal that we had when we all came into this job–to make a difference for kids– is so far removed from the real job of teachers.*

The reality of the sacred story is clear in these principals' minds. They have no choice but to implement the changes in policy yet there has been little in the way of assistance to prepare them or their teachers. To further exacerbate the situation, there is more than one policy change occurring, leaving staff confused and feeling helpless. There is a sense that no one is paying attention to the people who are on the practice landscape. Emily began relating her perceptions of some of the reasons why there may be difficulties in the schools: *There's been no inservice. Just do it! It has* *not been implemented. It's power over, power against. It's unfortunate.* Joan added her perceptions: *And people in your district who should [know more], know less about it than you do. If you go to the inservices, the superintendent is at the same inservice trying to figure it out too. They don't know enough about it. So the thing is, we don't have the trust to open up and say, "We don't know enough. Let's learn it together. Let's develop a process, let's work out our case." Is it a reflection of our overall unhappiness?*

Good questions. How do we manage the dilemma we feel over our sense of powerlessness? In the past, many stories have documented teachers' feelings of hopelessness as they struggle with living a cover story that enables them to survive on the professional knowledge landscape. Is it that different for principals?

Professional Development Plans

Despite feelings of inadequacy and lack of support, these principals felt compelled to implement the change to the best of their abilities. Perhaps these stories could be called cover stories in that they were a best response to the sacred story that was beyond the control of these people. As principals, they were not only accountable for their actions but for the implementation of the sacred story in their schools.

We began to talk about what we were willing to try. Michael began: *I had my teachers do a professional growth plan in September. It was the first time for me, and first time for them, so I integrated it into the one-on-one meeting. I put the professional growth plan on one side, "What are your goals?" and then their plan of action on the other side, "What are the step-by-step measures you are going to use to accomplish that goal for yourself?" Then we went through each one, and they* *dialogued on different ways that they were going to go about doing it, and I jotted down notes on the side for myself. In May what we're going to do is go back to those objectives and to their plan of action. I asked the teachers to prepare a portfolio to demonstrate their learning: "This is what I've done to look at this issue here." Now, it was the first time for myself and the first time for them, but I felt, what better way to do it than on the one-on-one, a natural state for dialogue?*

Michael's efforts were laudable in the face of increasing pressure to perform. This was a trial year and principals did not have to implement any part of the policy. However, many made an attempt to experiment with the change. Let's listen in on several principals as they described their efforts.

Teresa: *Because goal setting has been part of our one-on-one meetings, I feel that for our staff it's not going to be a big problem, We haven't required them [teachers] to document what they do afterwards, so to me this is likely the next step. We've been talking about this and I have talked to them about, "What are you doing to keep this experience fresh and good for you, to be alive in your practice?"*

Michael: *I saw, on our staff, teachers who really looked at learning: "This is what I'm really interested in." And then others, who wrote, "I want to make a difference for kids." Well, we all do, but what are some things you need to be working on?*

Teresa then explained in more detail the approach she plans to use. *I'm going to ask people to try just one thing. I want to try not to pressure people. I'd like them to have a good experience, and I'm going to try and do something with collaboration where they sit and talk to one another, "I'm trying to do this," and somebody would say,* *"What about this, or what about that? Could you do this?"* Emily contributed her ideas: *I didn't do anything [with the new process] this year. I did do one-on-one meetings with staff, but that's a dying model. But next year I'm going to introduce the new process. Other schools sent me copies of what they were doing, but it didn't fit for me, so I thought, rather than plunge into it, what I'd like to do is wait and talk about it for next year. Some of my teachers may wish to do something alone; some might like to enter a collaborative professional development plan with a colleague that they could work on together and maybe come to a three-way conversation. I can see all kinds of possibilities.*

The response was positive from these principals. They were doing their best to transform the process into one in which teachers are partners in making meaning rather than passive recipients of policy change.

The Proof is in the Pudding

Margaret: *It's one thing to say in policy, "Do a professional development plan." But how much of our work should be geared towards helping teachers or at least in some way enabling them to think of areas in which they could develop?*

Emily responded: *I think some people are going to come to you, and it's going to be obvious you don't have to open your mouth; they know themselves really well, they've set their plan, they know where they're headed. But somebody else, you might know with your years of experience, that they could take it a little further. It's that negotiation. You might want to push them and say, "Have you considered this?" I don't think it would be just sitting down and listening, and whatever goes, goes. I think I'd like to be part of it.* Emily, a principal of many years, had been slow to respond to the change in sacred story. In her words *" I wasn't even sure myself where this was going, so I didn't look at it in a formal way."* Her description of what she would like to do follows: *I'd like it to be open ended and creative. I'd like people to really look at what it is they themselves are going to do, and I'd like to suggest that it be collaborative with a colleague or even a small group if they wish, depending on what they want to focus on. [I want] to get people feeling good about the process—a real opportunity to reflect on their practice, as you did, Teresa. Share what you shared, how some person might do it in a very kind of straightforward kind of way, somebody else might like to web it out, or somebody else might like to do it artistically, or somebody might like to do it in another, different form.*

Bob was last to add his plans to the picture: *I'll be continuing with the critical self-evaluations. I sent you the handout for staff, the cover page, and the scripture of what we do at our school. "Here's the way we do things, and we're going to have a one-on-one meeting. You can discuss, you're going to show me, show me evidence that, in fact, the goals you've set for yourself, you are achieving," which is the critical part of goal setting, of course. That works very well, and we do a third of the staff each year.* Bob was very clear about his role as principal and how he has responded to this particular policy sent down from above. His district has an evaluation process that they do not plan to change substantially in light of the proposed changes in provincial policy. As he put it lightly, "*We wag the dog, it doesn't wag us!*"

It was obvious that the principals gathered in this group had carefully considered the implications of this change in their work with teachers. The policy change calls for a more transformational style of leadership, an irony in a province where results and accountability hold the day. It requires skill sets that many principals have not developed and they are unaccustomed to using.

One such set of skills that the group discussed related to our use and choice of language. Lambert and Gardner (1993), in their work on transformational leadership, were faced with a similar problem. They developed a way to examine language from different perspectives. In their view, language that is primarily reductionist carries assumptions that are mechanistic, static, hierarchical, manipulative, directional, and/or predictable. On the other hand, language that tends to be transformative or constructive in nature has embedded within it assumptions that are dynamic, engaging, inclusive, open, reciprocal, and/or unpredictable. Terms that would be considered reductionist include "*objectives, impact, alignment, and getting results.*" If these words were replaced by terms such as "*influence, approaches, outcomes, and working with people*," the ideas they are used to express become more transformational in nature. (Lambert et al., 1995)

Tannen's (1992) description of language usage was also helpful. She outlined two kinds of talk that people commonly engage in: report-talk and rapport-talk. Her explanation for these different kinds of talk is related to gender; that males tend to inform listeners while females try to connect with the listeners. Referring back to the motives for most human interaction–connectedness or power–we see how these kinds of talk become socially acceptable. In how we approached the change expected in the policy and ultimately, the work we do with teachers, we can use different kinds of talk. Certain words encourage connectedness and rapport–possibilities, opportunities, choices–while others support reporting of what was done–documents, lists, and goals.

Listen to Teresa using rapport-talk as she describes how she brought this change to staff: *We really encouraged collaboration because I really believe that there's more power working in pairs than alone.* She went on to describe how she simplified the task and asked teachers to do a little bit to start out. They began with journal writing and she encouraged them to bring their journals to the staff meeting. *I made it very clear it does not have to be an essay; it can be in point form; it can be phrases. "But would you, once every couple of weeks, give yourself a regular time just to stop and jot something down?"* The tone of her speech, the use of disarming words and the minimizing of the task all helped to lower the level of concern for Teresa's teachers.

Are there issues in our conversations between our needs for intimacy and independence? Power and control? Recall Emily's words in an earlier conversation: *One of the hardest things that I've coped with is just being willing to admit that I don't know or I don't have a skill in that area. Yet, I think that has been a very freeing thing for staff, because it has given them freedom to not know everything in all areas too. It's created a greater climate of learning among staff. So I think that's a change in relationship too. It takes you from that power position or that B-word position. I don't feel much like a boss person.* In trying to connect with one another, are we not continuously negotiating complex networks of meaning, striving to minimise our differences and reach consensus? Yet our connecting is most often situated in a context that is differentiated by status, where independence is critical. Much of the meaning in our conversation does not reside in the words spoken so much as the spaces between them. As listeners, we decide whether or not a person is trying to express connection or status. Their style, combined with our concerns, often has more to do with understanding than the words themselves.

In our research group, the issues we had to resolve between ourselves in order to understand them in our practice included ensuring a caring, trustful context was evident and removing elements of power and control. The skills we were seeking to emulate could be heard in this reflective question: *Did you feel you had enough direction, because I was quite open in letting you run [the group]. I was more interested in seeing how you responded as a group to your own needs? I didn't really want to direct it.* This approach, non-directive and genuinely caring, was then readily observed in Helen's words: *They need to loosen up—how do you have that with a staff? You sometimes need to go away from the school to do that. You have to create it in a different way, because I know some staffs go on retreats. That's why [at our school] we've taken four mornings instead of early dismissal. Those have been the times that we've been able to create that type of feeling. We've been able to get into conversation and say, "Ah! Aha! Now I know what you mean!" whereas before, you think that you're on the same track with someone, and you're not. Last time, actually, on our professional development day, we started at eight, went straight through till one-thirty, had just the one break in there, and then had our lunch from two till three. It was wonderful! Breaking bread together was really important at the end, because it's a different type of setting, and you just get to know people in a different way.* Helen's conscious efforts to make the environment intimate yet productive speak about the importance of leveling the school landscape so that teachers and principals can hear one another and grow together. Many places in the transcripts describe how the principals in this group worked hard to relate to and communicate with their teachers. Listen again as Helen expresses her need to talk to staff members in an on-going equitable way: *There are some days where I think, I didn't really talk to so-and-so. And it's not that you'll always have these deep, thoughtful conversations every day, but there has to be a contact. And if a teacher's been away or if I've been away or the day has been changed so that you haven't seen people, I feel it's like not seeing your own kids for the day: Where are they? Are they okay? Are they safe? Did they have a good day?*

The efforts people went to make contact, diminish differences, and be personally responsible were noticeable. *And, actually, I find when I have to call staff on the weekend to say, "Sorry, I forgot to mention this" or "Can I clarify this?" we have great conversations on the weekend. But you always feel that you're disturbing their personal time.*

A Continuum of Knowing

The first night we were there I felt outside... I didn't feel uncomfortable, I just knew I was outside of that group; experiencewise, I knew I was. Contrast Amber's words with her early perspective of herself in the research group with her later views: *I still have a hard time; I haven't articulated enough to defend it yet. I know what I believe, and I hope I walk it, but I guess I felt that the group had been doing what they've been doing long enough, that they've talked about it long enough, that they've really sorted it out, and I was still sorting out.* Amber's final comments bring her full circle: *I don't think it'll matter where you are or who you're with, even if it's your* *best buddy, you'll still think before you open your mouth. I do it less with this group than any other group now, which is very comforting and very nice.*

The knowledge paradigm described in *Women's Ways of Knowing* was a third perspective considered by our group. Blenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1991) described a continuum of knowledge that ranges from silence to received, subjective and procedural knowing to constructed knowledge. Understanding different epistemological perspectives may help map out our own thinking and responses to learning. Silent knowing, as seen in Amber's first remarks, refers to people knowing through concrete experience, not words. They know what they know but cannot express or do not have language to share their thinking. In this case, Amber's knowing was silent knowing; she knew what she believed but couldn't yet articulate it. Received knowledge speaks about knowledge as given to one by authorities or experts. The learner is capable and efficient at soaking up information. Subjective knowing refers to the belief that one's own ideas are unique, valued and come from one's experience. Knowledge that is accurate, precise, logical and appropriate for analysis is procedural knowledge. Amber finished her remarks with this statement: *I wanted the group to come to see my school because I'm really proud of it. I know the feeling there, and I knew that when they left there they'd feel really good too. I thought maybe what I do would have some more value.*

Constructed knowledge integrates the strengths of previous positions and shapes a person's ideas through sharing new systems of thought. The learner seeks truth through questions, dialogue and critique of arguments. Listen to Bob as he discusses his experience: *And just comparing the stories—the stories idea is a really neat one—allows you to shape so many new attitudes, attitudes about things you had no* *knowledge about before.*

From where we situated ourselves on the professional knowledge landscape, an epistemological approach was helpful. The policy clearly defined for us the procedural knowledge that was necessary for implementation. Setting goals and targets demonstrates one's ability to recognise different frameworks and analyse one's teaching. A constructed knowledge approach was more evident when we examined the range of possibilities available to teachers that are encouraged and supported by the change. The paradigm helped us recognise that different persons would be in different places on the professional development continuum.

Further Along the Road

After months of talking, experimenting, and meeting with committees, Margaret again put the question before the group. *Where are you now with this change in the evaluation policy? You've all seen the framework; you all know that it's a shift. The change is less top down, working out and planning a professional development event or series of events with your teachers. We've spent a lot of time talking about professional development. Do you feel, from your perspective, things have changed any? Do you feel you've changed your approach? What words are you hearing in your school? What are you hearing in your district?*

These principals now, however, were ready to describe their efforts. Paul jumped in immediately: *We're doing it, yes, we're doing it. We've had a committee that worked on this and we had a great debate about whether we're going to wait for the provincial regulations and guidelines to come out, or whether we're just going to take the step and go. Thank God we took the step and went, because we're still waiting for the provincial* *guidelines. The way it was done: an inservice package was presented, and a variety of formats to fill out and work with were presented to each administrator team. We gave choices to people once we explained what the process was, where the ATA [Alberta Teachers Association] stood on it, because that was really important, for them to hear that the ATA was really behind this, and that they had some major input. I think having the choices about how we could go about presenting, developing, and working with what we call the PDP Plan, Professional Development Plan, was important. We're at the point in our school where we've already gone through the first interviewing session in which we, a teacher and two administrators, sit down and talk about what their plans have been.*

And the sharing part with other teachers is an interesting thing, because it's something that just grew out of what we were doing. We were really heartened, I guess, excited, about how hard teachers are on themselves all the time! When you give them opportunity, they're really hard on themselves.

And our role, we found, was to try and help them [the teachers] become more realistic with some of their goals and development plans. We had a section, "What am I going to do that's going to help student learning in my development plan?" It spoke directly to what teachers were doing in their classroom. Then, "What am I going to do to align with the school ABL Plan?"[Annual Blueprint for Learning, a three-year education plan]. And the last part was optional: "From a personal-professional view, what do I want to do?" And I would say ninety percent of our people chose that [option], which was really quite interesting.

Much discussion ensued from Paul's opening remarks. People asked questions about the format, timing, and how much time it took. Several wanted copies of what Paul had used with his staff. Most were impressed with the way his district had tried to tie theory and practice together. Finally, several were struck by his comment about how hard teachers were on themselves. Paul elaborated further: *Teachers took a serous approach to this and generally chose areas they felt negative about and wanted to work on. It was hard for them to see the positives at first.*

Emily then added her comments about the approach that she employed: *I used some of the material that you [Paul and Teresa] sent me, which was excellent, and I acknowledged your district for their work. From there we developed some templates to fit our school. The teachers chose one learning goal that's specific to their own structure, one tied to the school growth plan and one that's personal. That was part of my own formula in the past, but not quite so specific as following the Quality of Teaching document.*

I felt that the staff was really excited about this. And I think what they're most interested in is the fact that everyone is assumed to be a professional; competency is assumed. I think that was very important for teachers to hear. We're halfway through our one-on-ones because it's a new process for us; we didn't do it last year. But we're feeling the staff is very excited about it; actually, it's a better process than we had in place. Teresa continued by sharing what she and her staff did this year. *We followed the process and one of the things I found, was that once they [the teachers] found out how really and truly simple it was: we've taken an approach to keep it as simple as the teacher wants. We've shared different possible formats. I was* *thrilled at our meetings when the staff came with some of the creativity. Not a great deal, but some people—one person color-coded all hers—and it was just interesting to see what they did.*

But the other thing we did with our staff was that we encouraged them to work in teams so our two Grade 2 teachers have a writing project together. We really encouraged collaboration because I really believe that there's more power working together than as one.

And some of the things were as simple as saying, "Take a calendar and jot some things on it, like on a monthly calendar." Or journal writing: "At our next meeting would you bring me your journal?" I made it very clear it does not have to be an essay; it can be in point form; it can be phrases. "But would you, once every couple of weeks, give yourself a regular time just to stop and jot something down?"

Finally, the last thing that we did, because the first ones went so well, was decide to build in a "So How's It Going?" [session] in January. The teachers started with such great enthusiasm, and we thought, to honor the process, we would meet again to discuss [what was happening].

Non-Compliance

Margaret: *Have you encountered any teachers that have said, "I won't do this. I hate this!"* Teresa responded: *I have a friend, a colleague principal, who did. A staff member just threw it in her face, did a gangplank thing. The teacher answered one word per question, like "survive, survive, survive." It was really difficult.*

When we probed further to find out what might have motivated the teacher to respond in that way, Teresa elaborated: *I think it's a reflection of where the person is.*

The principal has been holding discussions with people, and she is not dropping it, because she sees it as noncompliance. Her other alternative is to start an evaluation. It's a challenge.

I didn't expect anything to happen with the staff I'm on right now. After a number of years together, we're a pretty cohesive, strong group. But sometimes you get into a situation, as this principal did, where she was put in to bring about change. So I could see that happening on that staff.

No other person in the group reported a situation like this. All had encountered positive responses to the change. However this kind of response is not unusual when changes occur on the professional knowledge landscape when little or no input has been solicited from the persons affected. This "sea change" in teacher evaluation has an implied prescription for both principals' and teachers' actions. While making an effort to be personal, relational, and transformational, the policy/sacred story remains abstract, impersonal, and transactional. With language such as "encourage, foster, and assist," we are heartened. When we read that the policy guides us to act in the best educational interests of students and to follow principles of fundamental justice and due process, we are inspired. This is, however, government policy and we have no choice but to enact it as part of our duties. Support for the change in the implementation is so to date unavailable.

As part of a larger government effort to improve teaching, there are three key strategies which include updating teacher preparation and certification requirements to reflect the most current understanding of effective teaching; establishing competencies for beginning teachers; and developing a co-ordinated approach to professional development program delivery (1996, p. 2). Perhaps the efforts of principals in concert with teachers, implementing the policy with "balance, care, and a clear voice" (Goldberger et al., 1997), will make the transformational difference.

Ways of Knowing

From planning to actual implementation, these principals had taken the sacred story and had made it work for them. The epistemological shift from theory to practice had created dilemmas for them too. Wanting to make connections and to continue to weave the web of relations often interfered with the procedures of the change. Principals as well as teachers live in two places on the professional knowledge landscape. The first is similar to the in-classroom place, where our secret stories hold the day. While principals are not inside a classroom per se, they have similar places where they can "let their hair down" and talk openly about their concerns. Many principals have one or two confidantes with whom they meet on a regular basis. It is with these people and often behind closed doors that the secret stories are told. Principals also gather in out-of-classroom places–meetings, inservices, and management retreats. Stories there in front of their colleagues are often full of descriptions of the things they are doing. Tales of new resources that have come into the school, how many computers they now have, or how they managed to squeeze extra staff time from Human Resources are often the substance of these stories. While their stories are not always the same stories of their teachers, they resonate in similar ways. Too much to do, not enough time to do it, one more thing to do, the same old story, are commonly heard from both principals and teachers.

Our discussions about professional development plans carried us to many places. Having begun with some trepidation and lack of confidence about the changes, these principals spent many hours discussing with colleagues and each other how they would approach this. The range of responses from different persons within the group indicated the various places where we were more comfortable in our learning.

Margaret: *It's interesting that we're already talking about how to make this better. And maybe that's an important comment—that it's better the way that it is, but it's still not there yet.* We were all in agreement that the new policy was an improvement but there was still fine-tuning ahead. Emily's parting comment said it all: *It is evolving. We have it on paper, but I don't know if we have it in practice. We can put anything on paper. But do we have it in practice? I think that's the bigger question for everything, even the growth plan. Teachers can do magnificent growth plans, but is it in their practice? And are we, as administrators, then living it out in our practice? That's the hard part, I think.*

This was a sobering thought to finish on. We are only as good as what we can enact and embody. The notion of a lexicon for leaders, so abstract and elusive at first, had taken on a substantial meaning. Those words that describe and define our practice can frame and reframe messages that either make meaning or destroy it. Words we use in our conversations with others can present endless possibilities or close the door to further exploration. The tone of our voices and the subtlety of the words that we choose to speak can damn us or free us to speak the unspeakable. The ways that we labor toward understanding, through negotiation of meaning and shared power, help us to create common maps from which all can act.

The concept of "sacred story" from the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1995) is significant in the understanding of this larger story. Teachers and principals are expected to use the language of the conduit, that is, of plans, results, and objectives, to tell about what matters most to them. This presents a dilemma of expertise. They appear unknowledgeable and uncertain in their own language; they become more expert and professional if they use the language of the conduit. The difficulty therein, according to Clandinin and Connelly (1995), is that no matter how hard one tries to get below the surface, secret stories remain untold and unable to inform our practice. Have we heard only cover stories in our search for meaning?

Our next and last journey describes one principal's story of the work in which she and a new teacher on her staff engaged. It is a telling example of how a change in practice mandated from the conduit is difficult to implement.

Chapter Six

A Weekend Retreat

Casually dressed and sitting around sharing stories—some might humorously call this the "pyjama party model" of professional development. It had been a day filled with new and interesting sights. We shared a glass of wine and sat back, Friday evening stretching ahead of us, ready to hear our stories.

We had gathered, seven of nine, at Amber's home in the country. Visiting her school and its rural setting had provided us with lots to think about. Surrounded by the safety of the group, we relaxed and let our professional hair down. It was a moment unlike anything we had experienced before. A spirit of fun engaged the group. Bob and Amber pulled out guitars and we sang campfire songs generally heard at an elementary school camp. In between the banter and slightly out of tune music, we rummaged around for stories.

As principals with busy lives, we sought help from one another on trying issues. We practiced articulating our beliefs as we shared back and forth. We affirmed and supported one another, sometimes disagreeing agreeably. As we shared common plights and delights, we co-labored for understanding. We took the opportunity to commemorate the everyday day acts and uncommon rebellions that characterize our lives as principals.

The story featured here, a simple but elegant one, was part of a long conversation we had sitting about Amber's living room. It is a conversation of practice shared as a response to a dilemma raised by one of our group. Its stories demonstrated the need all of us have for connection as well as our desire for continuous learning and constructing of meaning. As the conversation began to take form, ebbing and flowing, and the group members moved in and out of it, overlapping, supporting, and inquiring, a deeper understanding of what it means to enable professional growth emerged.

In the Beginning

The story opened as Teresa began to tell the rest of the group about her journey with a new staff member. *I'm beginning to think he's arrogant and that he sees himself—he's twenty-eight and a rookie—as above everybody else. I had a chat with him the other day. He makes, I think, unwitting put-downs to staff. For instance, we had the Internet installed the other day and, of course, there were some glitches. His comment: "I'm not going to explain it to you, because I know you're not really up on technology." Or "We're going to put on this talent show because the kids in this school really haven't ever had an opportunity to perform," when we have had two concerts a year forever! It's coming new to the school and making these kind of condescending comments, coming into the staff room on the night of parent-teacher interviews and saying, "You know, I just had the most ego-boosting evening! These parents think I'm the greatest teacher their kids ever had!" What message is he giving? Or this? "The Grade 6 French marks went down because they weren't taught French properly before I came."*

Teresa continued: *He's very focused on kids, and we never see him in the staff room because he's got Running Club every morning at eight o'clock, and he goes out on recess with the kids. His defence was, "I'm here for the kids." I responded, "Part* *of being here for the kids is being part of the team, because we're doing something overall as a school here, and in order to work as a team for the kids, I want people to be an integral part of the team."*

I had a chat with him because of a little crisis. He's our technology person, and he's certainly far ahead of probably ninety percent of the people in the district. But our computer lab was a mess, and it's part of his responsibility. So I brought him into the lab and I said, "I just want to have a chat with you about some things." I told him that I wanted to share some perceptions, and then I would like him to go away and to think about what I said. We would then meet in another week. I talked to him specifically about the computer lab and the state it should be. I don't know if he listens, but at the end he said, "Okay, I'd like to repeat what you said." His first comment was, "So, on the overall, you don't think I'm doing enough." And I said, "No, that's not what I said. I talked to you specifically about the computer lab." "And so do you think I'm arrogant?" I said, "I think that you're setting yourself apart from the staff with some of your comments. All of us want to be great teachers, but our actions speak louder than words. And in this particular culture, the culture of this particular staff, nobody's a star." That's a very strong part of the culture here; it was here before I came. It's everybody for the whole big picture, and sometimes it's a little frustrating because the teachers will not accept nominations for the Excellence in Teaching [Award], for example, and I think there's a downside to that. But generally, he is abrasive to the culture. Now I'm now in the process of trying to figure out why I'm really struggling with this. I have also started questioning myself–have I spent enough time with him? I've been going by and visiting him, I've been in his room, and I've had him in for two half-

hour conversations. But now I'm beginning to think I haven't spent enough time with him. I'm feeling I'm questioning myself now. "You were remiss!"

One of the things I mentioned the other day, "This is a leadership role, and in order for others to be able to avail themselves of your knowledge, you have to get to know each other as people." I also talked to him about trust and comfort. I said, "If somebody takes you seriously on the comments you've made in staff meetings, I'm not sure they're going to be able to ask you how to cut and paste in ClarisWorks." Emily: *And so how did he respond to that?* Teresa: *He said he had never thought of it before. He said he's happy, and he can handle himself okay. He thanked me. He said, "I thank you for your candour." I asked him if he could look at his workload overall and if he could find three times in a week that he could come into the staff room. He said that he would do that, and I noticed when I went in this morning for a Friday morning visit, he was there. And when I went at recess he was there, and he made a point of saying hi to me [laughs], so I'm sure he'll say, "I'm there!"*

Thinking Aloud

Emily: *You say it's his first year? And he's in a leadership position, which is an amazing responsibility for a first-year teacher who probably is very insecure. Deep down, he probably is hoping to God that he's making it. That ego statement probably was his way of saying, "I feel really good because people think I'm doing a good job." He just doesn't express it in the same way. And for a young guy to be leading is probably pretty high risk for him.* Teresa: *I'm really glad we're having this conversation.*

Teresa's comments reflected her sense of concern and doubt over this issue. She demonstrated her strong need for connection and she was mindful of the trust and care needed in her choice of words. Teresa was also seeking affirmation of her actions and words in a stressful situation, where the support of the group is critical. Emily was a natural in leading the conversation. Her many years in the principalship provide credibility and a unique repertoire of ideas. Listening intently, Emily, again, entered into the conversation: *There are a couple of things [I'm thinking about], just listening to your story. The fact that he's there for the kids, I see that as a positive. I can see a beginning teacher not understanding because he's never experienced what it's like to be part of a team in a school. He sees himself as being really focused on his teaching and wanting to really make a difference for kids. I can see that being part of his new learning because he's just beginning.*

I was thinking of my own son while you were talking. He's in a school where the staff is not very collaborative, and he puts all his energy into the kids. He's with them at noon hour, at clubs. I don't think he's an isolate in the school, but he feels he's focused on his kids.

When I was at my last school we had a very strong culture like you have. I found out later that new people found it really hard to fit into it, because the culture was like a big family, and new people had difficulty joining. I can remember once a counsellor about three quarters through the year saying to me, "This is the most difficult school I've ever come to, in terms of fitting in," and I was absolutely shocked, because we were all so tight. I thought we did have a culture for socialising new people. But we were so into it that sometimes it was really hard for new people to fit. They felt like they were on *the outside looking in, so then they energised their kids instead. So your new teacher may be experiencing a little of that and might not be able to express it. Maybe he's just totally absorbed in his teaching. Maybe all that's important to him at this stage of his career is being that really excellent teacher with kids and going out at recess and all of those things.*

Emily's remarks served to neutralise the pain of the problem and affirm Teresa. She countered by telling her own story similar to Teresa's, offering support for her position. Such a peace-making move helped share the difficulty and encouraged empathy in the other members in the group. We were quiet but supportive during this intense listening moment.

Teresa continued with her story: *We assigned a guardian angel to him, his teaching partner, the other Grade 6 teacher. She's probably about as wonderful, in that way, as you'd ever get. But I think you're right, Emily, and I recognise this, because I said this to my partner, "His satisfaction comes from the kids, the adoration of the kids. That's really important to him."* Emily: *And that's part of the growth period of a teacher, I think.* Teresa: *And certainly if you're not satisfied working with the kids, you shouldn't be there. But I think you're right—that's his prime focus right now.*

Analysis Paralysis

Margaret: *What strikes me, that I find interesting, is that as you embark on work with a teacher, the incredible amount of important analysis that has to occur. I hear you struggling to sort out where that person is coming from. When you're talking about the importance of communication as a principal, what does that really mean? What are you saying when you use that word?* Teresa: *I think that's a very* *interesting point, because that word, which we use very glibly, has an underlying tone to it. I think there's psychology in our communication. And again, if you think of different situations, one of the things I find is that communication has so many parts. When you are working in the professional growth mode of the teacher, you have to ask yourself, "What am I doing here? What's the purpose of my being here? Am I coming here with a bias?" And this teacher, he's a rookie to teaching, but he's not a rookie to the work world. He's been in the business world. But I am so protective of the culture of the school, I try to be so careful, and I really don't like anybody wrecking—* Emily: *So maybe there's something that has to be looked at that's beyond just looking at him.*

The Rest of the Story

Teresa: *I tried this communication approach, "My purpose is that there would be something successful in the end. This may feel delicate. This might not be an easy conversation." But I usually tell people, "I'm just someone who puts the cards on the table," and even though the conversation may be difficult, I'll try and assure them that I am well intentioned. I usually say, "It's because I really care about you" or "I see potential in you." So I did that kind of thing. I said that I thought people would want to get to know him, to know of a few things going on in his life, "I've had the privilege of sharing some things with you, and I'm not sure that other people have. I'm not sure that they're getting to see all the gifts that you have to bring." But I suspect, though, that something has to happen for him in that staff room from somebody else, because I think obviously by the fact that he spoke to me there the way he did at recess this morning, he was saying, "present."*

I was reflecting on some things that occurred the other day. He played the guitar for our religious celebration on Earth Day, and of course, some people got really upset. The ending song was "*I've got the Whole Wide World,*" *which he actually goofed up, because he saw it as a performance. So he did a rock star piece at the end. Afterwards I went to the teachers who had planned the celebration and I said, "That was really nice. I loved how you did this." And one teacher, who's bordering on retirement, said, "Come on, Teresa, it would probably be better if you just said, "It had its moments." And I said, "We've got to work with what we've got. We've got a new talent here, and it may require some nourishment. It'll be okay." But, somebody has to reach out to him too.*

Emily: *Did you tell him that, "We really need you in the staff room because you add a different perspective?" Is he coming to the staff room now because he thinks you want him to, and is he going to do it now because he wants to get a good evaluation? Does he see that he is an integral part of the staff and his energy is needed there?* Teresa*: I talked to him (and I didn't just dump on him) about how glad I was when he came along because he was young and enthusiastic.* I led in with, *"You are making a lot of contributions, and there are a lot of things that are going well. And the purpose of my conversation is going to be something that I hope brings a successful outcome for you in all of this."*

Shining Lights

Emily: *You know, too, Teresa, it's interesting what you're talking about. You said he's kind of like a bit of a shining star, and people don't like shining stars. And I think that's an interesting thing to dialogue on. There's that quote by Nelson*

Mandela, "It's our light, not our darkness, that we're most often afraid of." One of the things in a positive culture is that those bright, shining stars need to come out now and again. People have to feel free to express themselves—maybe he's not totally accepted because he's a little different. Bob: *It sounds like the other staff has picked him up as being a bit of an outcast.* Teresa: *I think they see him as a bit of an upstart, and I find that a little sad. And I said to some of them, "Isn't it interesting? This is what we've been wanting, somebody young and somebody who energises, because the majority of this staff is over forty. Isn't this what we've been waiting for? And shouldn't we be glad that there's someone who wants to do Running Club three days a week and do Journal Games?" We haven't had a Journal Games team for the last three years because nobody wanted to spend nine hours waiting for their team to run. But what this conversation has helped me do is see it more from his point of view. I want this nice cosy staff—I don't want anything to change the good stuff that's happening: "Don't anybody come here and mess with this picture!"*

Our conversation continued to describe a common situation in which many principals find themselves with new teachers on staff. Emily: *I think that very, very strong beginning teachers, like the shining-star types, have a hard time fitting in, because I think they really disturb people's comfort zones, and people get uptight. There's a lot of professional jealousy, even with good, solid people with a good, solid career going. I've seen it more than once, where you hire somebody who's a go-getter, the other people resent him or her because their students love them, and the parents love them. I think those teachers have a hard time fitting in.* Teresa: *And one thing that does disturb me because it does seem quite prevalent is that nobody should be out in front of* *anybody else. There's got to be a way to be energetic or do a great job. Why can't we let people do their thing? Why can't we accept that we all have different gifts or talents and that collectively it's good for all of us?* Emily: *I think that people have to shine, not bury your light under a bushel. You have to be able to use your talents to the fullest. Everybody should have permission to let his or her own light shine.* Teresa: *Yes, let their own light shine. We don't have to be afraid of what we don't have, but we're afraid of the power we do have.* Emily: *Yes that's the one. I talked to my staff this year, because I have three new teachers on staff. The teachers have been together for seven years in this school, and are a competent group of people working in a very affluent community. There's a lot of pressure for everybody to be up there producing good programs. And three new teachers came into the school, including myself, although I'd been there before and I knew most of the staff. And I started my year off talking about light. I read them a book called Peppy and the Lamplighter, and I shared the "burying your light under a bushel" story. Also I told a story from my own career about the importance of being able to be who you are and bring whatever talent you have to the school. But all of my new teachers within the first four months came to me and said, "I feel like if I bring up a new idea they [the other staff] say, "Well, we don't do that here." Or I bring up a new idea and they say, "Well, that won't work here," or they dismiss it.*

The school was very tight, but it wasn't tight to the welcoming in of the new teachers. It was that socialising into the culture that was difficult. And every single one of them came to me with something like that, and I had to really encourage them to just do it. If you have a good idea that you want to do, do it. Other people will buy into it slowly if it's something that's going to work. So I think it really is hard for new people to *fit into a school where the teachers have been together. One of the examples one new teacher wanted to do was a project about reading around the solar system, and the librarian said, "Oh, no. Here everybody does their own thing." I just happened to walk in on the conversation, and I said, "Tell me about this reading around the solar system." So she told me, and I said, "Why don't you bring it up at the staff meeting?" So she brought it up, and I said, "Sounds like something interesting." And then other people agreed and so now we're doing it. It started off slowly, but it's really picked up. But she [the new teacher] was feeling that she couldn't bring out any ideas to the staff because they'd all say, "Well, we don't do that here" or "It's different."*

I.S.W.B.

Bob joined in the conversation: *You know what I do? This is probably a mad practice, but if a teacher on my staff does something that's obviously dumb, they've made a mistake, I put "I.S.W.B."—"In Shit With Boss"—on the whiteboard and put the teacher's name underneath. I really do. And we make light of it. And everybody understands that that's what happens. We don't do it for really important things, just those dumb things like missing supervision or handing out a test booklet when you weren't supposed to.* Emily: *And does the staff accept that willingly?* Bob: *Oh, yes. It's part of the culture.* Emily: *So they know that there's care attached to it or you wouldn't do it.*

Rewards of the Work

Emily: *I learned a valuable lesson many years ago when I had a teacher on staff who I just loved; she was just the most beautiful teacher. You know Bob, how you were saying we have our favourites. There are people that you feel really good about it; usually it's because they support you or you like what they're doing with kids. Anyway,* *it was a teacher who was very, very positive, and it was her last year in the school, but she was getting caught up in a negative group. I think most schools have that, the group where the glass is always half empty rather than half full. Although I didn't know what kinds of things might be going on, she became part of that, I observed it in her over the year. She had asked for a transfer out of the school; she was moving on in her career. And I debated and debated and debated whether I should sit down and talk to her about it, because while she didn't do anything overtly, I knew it was happening. Finally I decided I would. I decided that I'd have one of those talks about professional conduct and professionalism, and just indicated to her that I did notice the shift and that she did have many beautiful qualities. I said, "You are so gifted as a teacher, and I just wanted you to know that when you get caught up in that kind of negative strand, that it really pulls you down." I wanted her to kind of internalise that before she went on to her next step. And anyway, it was hard for me to talk to her about it. But the amazing thing—I'll never forget—the next day I came in, and there was this huge bouquet of flowers on my desk, which you don't usually expect to get after you've had that kind of conversation. But she came in, and she cried a bit that day. She came in the next day and she said it was the best thing that ever happened, "You could never have done a better thing for me than to sit down." Because, number one, I can't believe that you knew what was going on. I'm sorry, but, yes, you're right, I did get caught in that space. And you're right, it has pulled me down professionally, and I won't let it happen again." And I had thought it was a conversation to worry about; it was the same experience [as Teresa's]. I knew I had to help her to grow because she was such a wonderful teacher, and I didn't want her to go to the next school and get caught up in the same kind of situation, which is so easy to get into— we've all been there. I was there as a teacher. We'd go to the bar, and we'd growl every Friday night about everything that went on in the school. Until I went to my next school where I met this principal who had such professionalism. He placed the code of ethics and professional conduct of teachers and the quality of* *professionalism as the number-one priority in his school. And I'll never forget walking in there and feeling like such a professional and reflecting back on my three years in the other school where we growled every single Friday at the bar about our colleagues, about the administration, about the kids, about the parents. I mean, it was the culture I was in. And I was a beginning teacher; I probably thought that's what you did. That's what teachers do, is they go out and growl on the weekends about everything that didn't work during the week. Until I had the experience of being in that very professional environment where I suddenly realised what it meant to be a professional person, and that was such a turning point for me. So I had that story to share, and I shared that story with that teacher, how I did that for three years, what she was getting into, and that I could see it. And how it was a downward spiral for me. I really got to dislike that school I was in and I think part of it was because all we did was look at what wasn't working and we never looked at what was.*

Taking the Next Step

I think we owe it to our teachers, Teresa, to try to bring them that one step further. So I'm sure you will with that teacher. She might even send you flowers the next day! And it wasn't because I got the flowers that it was a successful experience, but it taught me that it's okay to talk about something that disturbs somebody's comfort zone, but it might make them reflect. And there's always the possibility that the teacher will go that one step further and really internalise it, which this young teacher did. And even to this day when we meet she thanks me for that one little talk, which I didn't really want to have with her, and I debated whether I would or not. I didn't need to. She could have left, and that would have been that.

Pulling it All Together

The conversations shared above speak to many contemporary issues in schools. They are about learning in a community, beginning to teach, status and control, finding safe places on the landscape, and welcoming new people into existing learning communities. Our own learning as a group in community is explicit in this extended conversation. Our desire to tell stories, for relationship, and to think again (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) is evident.

Our need to tell stories to help create meaning was as strong as our need to reflect on actions taken and things thought. Teresa, like many principals before her, was struggling with the integration of a new teacher into a staff of older, experienced people. On the one hand she is delighted with the energy and enthusiasm the teacher introduced to the school. On the other, the change caused some turbulence with staff in her school, creating more work for her. The new teacher appears to be caught between two places on the landscape. While appearing to be able to handle the demands of his classroom, he is moving well beyond its walls. This overlapping into others' territory, the out of-classroom places, is seen as trespassing by the rest of the staff especially when accompanied by his disparaging comments. While he relates well to his students, he neglected his relationships with colleagues. Teresa, whose belief in staff relationships is preeminent, seemed most affected by this. Her struggles to get the teacher to come into the staff room and socialize with other staff loom before her. Meanwhile, Emily's comment is quite telling: *"So maybe there's something that has to be looked at that's beyond just looking at him."*

This conversation also raised issues of power and control. New teachers on the school landscape for the first time are usually on temporary contracts. Their status is low and they are virtually powerless. The principal is their evaluator and generally decides whether or they move to continuous contract or are relieved of their duties. This can create a moral dilemma for many new teachers. In their desire to do what they believe is right to make a difference for students, they cross boundaries that are entrenched in the school landscape culture. The principal is held hostage as well, often rationalising the new teacher's actions to staff and parents. There is no easy explanation.

Much of the conversation that occurred that Friday evening in Amber's living room might never had been heard anywhere else. Why is that? We are compelled to tell stories that express our desires for relationship and reflection. But sometimes we tell them at our peril. For us, these stories leave a mark, a signal of where we failed or where we have neglected our duties. Recall Teresa's remarks *"I've been remiss!"* As professionals, we are caught in our own moral dilemma and as a result often tell cover stories to relieve our consciences. Perhaps in a new and different setting, in a group where trust and relationship was upheld, we were finally freed to tell our secret stories.

A Different Kind of Journey

We finished with a moving story from Amber. It's the kind of story that we would all like to be written about ourselves as principals, especially by one of our staff. It resonated for each one of us because it told a story that each of us has witnessed in some form. It indeed sums up our work as well as the work of other principals who are trying to make a difference in the lives of children and teachers. Amber introduced the story in her typically self-effacing fashion: *Over the last few years I've been trying to figure out who I am in the school, what I want to be and what I started out wanting to be, not changing in some ways and changing in a lot of other ways. One of my teachers wrote this to me on January 31st, 1997, and I screamed when I read it on the e-mail, "This is it! This is what I want to do!"*

"Last night I was tired enough that I couldn't really think of an answer when you said that you felt that things were really starting to move, and you wondered now why that was happening. This morning it was much easier to think, and I came up with a picture that I think explains it. Here goes: I think that we have to go back to the picture of the train. When you [Amber] came on staff, the train had to stop at the station to pick you up and to get a few other things too. You, as the new engineer, went through the cars, meeting us and getting some idea of why each of us had chosen to journey on this particular train. We, on the other hand, spent some time getting to feel comfortable with you and getting a feel for just how you planned to drive this train, with help from us or all on your own, with your hands, your feet, etc. While we were in the station, your luggage was also put on the train, and some luggage that we had requested be added, and a few new passengers too. The train got a good overhaul so that it wouldn't break down, got a little polish, and we thought that we were ready to go.

But as the engineer you had different plans. You wanted to know where we wanted to go because a lot of us wanted to go to entirely different places and also some of us weren't sure where we wanted to go. So we sat down and came up with a vision of where we wanted to go. Then you introduced us to some new ways of *running trains and some great new motor parts and unique fuels. This in turn got some of the passengers who'd been too busy keeping their own seats comfortable or other such things travelling to other parts of the train to see how things were going for the other passengers. Soon some of them were trading seats, because they enjoyed the stimulation of the newly met passengers. The last string of the car, where we had never really ventured because those guys spoke French, actually had their doors removed and not only joined the rest of the passengers, but let the passengers into their cars to visit. Then you very kindly coaxed the passengers to pull up their window shades to enjoy the view, and most opened them, at least a little bit. The engine started, and away went the train. The engineer had replaced some of the archaic parts of the motor with some new ones, and these new buttons helped in that the engineer didn't need to be in the engine[car] all the time. The train gathered speed, and the passengers cheered because they had agreed on the place they were going, had looked at a map and jointly chosen the general route, and were now committed to travelling together as a team. I think that sometimes the train will have to stop at other stations in order to fuel up. But I think that is healthy, because then the passengers will be able to get out, stretch their legs, pick up some souvenirs, and then if they still want to go on to the next destination, they can hop back on.*

We were all awed with Amber's story. It stopped the conversation in the room as we thought of what it must have meant for a teacher to write this particular story and for Amber to receive it. We rejoiced for Amber, because her story was emblematic of what we are all trying to achieve, enabling the growth of teachers. Our countless hours together, conversing, all seemed worth it, in light of her story.

Chapter Seven

Reflections

One year later almost to the day. They had met for the first time in February 1997. Those were heady days indeed. Getting to know one another, sharing new ideas, testing their thinking with different colleagues. What had they learned? Would they do it again, given the opportunity? Would they continue to meet as the formal research project came to an end?

Our beginning assembly: Emily, Teresa, Joan, Bob, Amber, Helen, Paul, Michael, and Margaret, a group of principals gathered together for a qualitative research project. They had embarked on a journey of discovery. Were they able to understand how principals might enable teachers to grow and continue to learn? What were their stories of building communities of learners in their schools? Was it reasonable to assume that the group of people gathered had themselves grown and learned in that environment? Was this approach an example, a model, perhaps of how knowledge communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) develop and evolve?

These last stories are a look into the heads and hearts of the group of people mentioned above. The stories are about the realities of working together in a group for a year, what we learned and gained, what we continue to yearn for. While not a perfect picture, the results appear satisfying for most. They tell of a landscape of critical importance to learners and teachers: an enabling trustful environment that promotes learning and growth.

Telling my Story

> *My last experience studying at the university, completing a Master's Degree in Educational Psychology, was memorable. My thesis was a study of whether or not levels of empathy in cooperating teachers could be affected by providing them with an on-going program of assistance and professional development. It was a pre-test, post-test trial and under statistical analysis, the experiment failed. As could be expected, the personal experience with the teachers was magical. We shared and cared and felt it was a success. Of course, there was no way to reflect those findings in the study.*
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> *I cried at the end of my final defense, thankful the ordeal was over, but even more, regretful, because I had so thoroughly betrayed myself and the teachers with whom I lived and worked those past four months. I vowed, if there was ever a next time, I would not again compromise my beliefs about learning and teaching.*

It was this experience and the vivid memory of it that took me up the stairs to meet a professor with whom I had always felt a kinship. We met late one afternoon and she offered me tea and a safe place to talk about my dreams. It was at this time that she first held out the possibility to me of a collaborative supervision process with my department supervisor, in order to complete my dissertation. Little did I know it would become a groundbreaking experience for me. We quickly finalized the details and I prepared to begin a year's leave from my position as principal the following September.

It is only now clear to me how privileged I was not only to have excellent supervision in the process but also to have two supervisors! Both provided me tremendous support when I needed it and were a great complement to one another. As I worked more closely with them I grew from a student into a colleague. They assisted me in learning and acknowledging my particular strengths and shortcomings as I shared and wrote. As dual supervisors, they provided a much deeper, multi-dimensional analysis of my work because of their different styles but similar perspectives. A shared supervision was a blessing in my case. It was a nurturing, trustful environment that enabled me not only to navigate the hurdles but to release my talents so that the process was productive yet rewarding.

Diligently, I labored through January to March 1997, completing my proposal and taking my candidacy exam. By March, I had already begun the early stages of the research. All of the participants had been contacted and had agreed to join the group. We had met for a personal interview and one group session was completed.

We were a motley crew, nine principals from very different places on the school landscape. Not only did we come with a variety of backgrounds and a wealth of experience, we came from several different districts as well. One participant, Teresa, described our group in this way: *Every single person around the table, although we were all principals and we all had that same kind of basic caring, we cared deeply about what we did. We were all so different as people and there was so much to give.*

Significant Influences

The group was crowded with talent and creativity. We were eager to probe into the idea of professional development and in the words of Elliot Eisner, "See, rather than merely look, [which] requires an enlightened eye: this is as true and as important in understanding and improving education as in creating a painting" (1991, p.1). Our work was threaded with possibilities and hope. In Joan's words: *I was interested in it [the study] because you were going to do it differently. It wasn't just* *going to be on a one-to-one, you were looking at having some kind of interaction between people. I thought that was a much more interesting way of looking at how we think, grow, and learn.*

Learning Together

All groups come together for different reasons. Often in the beginning stages of development, members of a group aren't always clear as to why they are assembling. When I enquired of different participants what their thoughts were when they were first asked to join the research group, these were some of their responses. Teresa commented first: *We had a purposeful conversation about our work, about who we are and what we are and what it means to be in this role of school principal, the ups and downs of it and opening up to someone else and listening to how we see things. Every single person around the table, although we were all principals and we all have that same kind of basic caring, we cared deeply about what we did. We were all so different as people and there was so much to give. I know I've learned a lot of things from the other people—there were so many gifts around the table, and we were so different.*

Bob added his remarks: *It was wonderful! The main thing is that people from the different boards bring so many different looks at things, and they help to take your blinders off. It's been wonderful for me to gain that new insight. So it was both interesting to me and great fun.*

Helen added her thoughts: *I think there was a definite benefit from the diversity of the group. I think that, especially as administrators, we talk with our own groups, our own networks, and that's probably a safer place. But because [there* *were] people from different districts, different levels—it was a diverse group who were all very vocally inclined.*

Emily commented: *We were a vocal people and strongly opinionated about things. That was evident, I think, in the group, and that's probably the nature of the people who were there. But I thought it was a beneficial experience, because of the different perspectives.*

Communication was key as well. I think people really got into some gutsy nuts-and-bolts issues. I really felt that the dialogue was important, and I think we were certainly learning from each other, to reflect afterwards about what you talked about. It was a positive experience. I think any time you enter something like that, you learn from it. You feel you have something to give, but I think you come out of it with more in the end. You've got the dynamics of the different people, all very committed educators and all very strongly opinionated in certain areas, which I think showed a passion for what they did. There was nobody in there that was turned off his or her job. Even though we had trying times, everybody wanted to be a principal and was committed to their work and had their own kind of passion for the job. There were no real slackers in that group. They were really into their work.

Finally Michael added his thoughts: *And it was I think a very valuable, valuable learning for me. I've learned that you have to invest the time and you have to invest yourself too. You have to invest your ideas and your ways of thinking and have an open mind because someone can approach you with a whole different way of looking at something, and keeping that open mind is really important, because you* *don't know it all. And the synergy of working together, I think, has been wonderful. I really do enjoy working with others because you pick up good ideas.*

We were privileged in our community to be able to learn not only from our own experiences but also from those of the people around us. We had a capacity for building on each other's stories and not closing down when uncomfortable issues surfaced. We sustained each other and gained glimpses of how we might do our work differently. The diversity of the people added an important dimension. This is a key consideration for a learning-oriented group. As well, the caring relationship that the group nurtured was another critical ingredient. In Connelly and Clandinin's (1994) words "What is told, as well as the meaning of what is told, is shaped by the relationship" (p. 419) describe poignantly how we were able to share our stories without fear of reprisal or disapproval. What propelled this group to become the caring, interdependent group that emerged?

Profound Learnings

No Single Truth Exists

The fact that we were open to continuous learning was one of the many significant reasons we succeeded. As we worked together as a group, our learnings were quite basic but important. Probably the most significant was the realisation that there was no magic truth for which to seek. This was perhaps our most profound learning. We participated in the study in order to explore the actions in which principals might engage in order to enable persons to grow and develop. The thinking of Lambert et al. (1995) was instrumental to this. We understood reciprocal processes to be those that:

evoke potential in a trusting environment reconstruct or break set with old assumptions and myths

focus on the construction of meaning

frame actions that embody new behaviors and purposeful intentions (p. 36)

These notions were fundamental to this study. We purchased copies of *The Constructivist Leader* (Lambert et al., 1995) and discussed our understanding of it in our sessions. We came to understand that it was through evoking potential in a trusting world that individuals bring back memories, perceptions, and assumptions that underpin their work. These may be stories, discussions, writing, or drama. Whatever form they take, what is important is that they describe and make sense of the world. For us, telling a story to illustrate a question or unresolved issue was our way to reconstruct and demonstrate our values and beliefs. Recall Teresa's words: "*Are my values in place?*"

We developed a deeper understanding of those processes that reconstruct or "break set" with old assumptions, causing us to rethink our beliefs and accepted ideas in order to consider new approaches. For us, "breaking set" entailed gathering new data and posing questions, often causing cognitive dissonance as old beliefs were examined against reconceptualized ideas. Those processes focusing on the construction of meaning meant, for us as a group, talking, discussing, and airing points of view so that new combinations of ideas were introduced. As new ideas were shared, we blended together the many meanings we had assigned to them and we began to agree on the interpretations. Remember the story in chapter three where Joan was not in agreement with the others regarding report cards. As the session came to a close, she was reconsidering her original stance and beginning to shift her outlook based on the discussions.

Lambert et al. (1995) also describe the framing of actions that embody new behaviors and purposeful intentions as an important reciprocal process. We referred to the actions we took in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating our actions in response to the new understandings we had developed. Our struggles outlined in chapter five and the stories that were told, illustrate our efforts to reframe the policy regarding teacher evaluation and reconstruct a better, more humane approach. In the final analysis, when we embraced these processes and through them tried to construct meaning in our daily working and living together, we felt better able to address the compelling dilemmas facing us, especially in life in a school.

The research group rummaged in their memories and experiences, looking and seeing, listening and hearing, supporting and caring. We tinkered with ideas and listened to each other, and tried to open ourselves to the possibilities of the moment. It soon became clear that while new ideas and actions would likely emerge in the messiness and discomfort, we would not discover the "truth and only the truth". This seeming lack of direction, even incoherence, sometimes created frustrations not only with the process but also with the participants. Paul spoke about this when he shared his early concerns that he wasn't always comfortable with people's remarks. Listen as he talks about his feelings of frustration: *Some [participants] are better at listening than others. I don't know if it's because you put a microphone in front of people, but some people tend to want to dominate, and I don't know that it's conscious, because they've had some really good ideas, and I think they want to share them. There were* *times when I was very frustrated because I felt that when I would speak, I'd never finish what I was trying to get across.*

Another frustration related to not always knowing where we were going. Bob said it this way: *It was pretty obvious that you gave very little direction, just when you had those really specific needs. And I'm sure you had great confidence in the group that we would come up with the materials for you. We're an insightful bunch.* Amber described it differently but aptly: *I think I saw you where you weren't really sure who to be. I knew you wanted to be part of this conversation, because you are a principal and you live all of the things that this group lives. But at the same time, I felt that you were struggling with who to be "I want to be part of this, but I'm supposed to be the researcher," that kind of thing.* Neat, parsimonious, logical, elegant—we were none of those things but we created and re-created through our stories and remembrances, a bigger, messier, more expressive understanding that the process, not the product, makes the difference. We were "playing" with meaning, as we moved towards a deeper understanding of how we enable growth in others and ourselves. And, through it all, we enjoyed the play and yearned for more. We became what we set out to research—a group of learners not satisfied with just one answer and compelled to pose leading questions and break set with old ideas.

Committed Relationships are Key

Understanding the importance of relationship was the second profound learning for us. The stories in this study describe our attraction and care for one another and our hunger for relationships that are reciprocal and rewarding. We were driven to seek connections with one another and beyond. Our need to become a stable group in which it was safe to explore and reveal was paramount. It allowed us to negotiate how we would live together, and freed us to change and grow capacities we didn't know existed. In Amber's words: *Somehow someone brought us together, and we collectively bloomed and blossomed. We're feeling that as individuals we're really different, but now there's something about the collective-ness, that we wouldn't have as clearly defined a dream, as one would have in terms of a school goal, but we certainly move. We move in all kinds of spaces.* It was in the "blooming and blossoming," in our ability to change as members of the group, that the possibilities for us to experiment were created and as such, we continued to grow and co-evolve. There was freedom to express and experiment in a context that was safe and invitational. This deepened our understanding of how critical it is to ensure this context exists for all of our work in making meaning. The paradox of becoming stable yet being free to change led to a profound understanding for us in terms of enabling the further development and growth of others and ourselves.

In Amber's observation: *I'm not sure which was the turning point, but there was a turning point where the group became— more committed. Yes, more committed, more—I don't want to say cohesive—but more committed.* Coming together as a group is one aspect of development; staying together is another, more urgent one. Every group of individuals comes to a place where they will commit beyond the cover story of their lives. Our group was no different. Listen to Amber again share her views: *When we got right down to it, it boiled down to the relationships we have with each other. Going to somebody's house and staying overnight takes you to a whole other place. It means that you share a lot of yourself,* *even just your personal habits: Do you snore? Do you get up? What are your jammies like? And we're closed people in terms of our personal lives. If you went to each of our schools and asked people about our personal lives—remember Paul saying that it took him many years before he had a staff party at his house—I'm not sure what they would answer. And so at the overnight retreat, I was surprised so many people came, because it said, "I'm ready to go to that next level," where we're really into the day-to-day, "You get to see me with my hair sticking up in the morning." That's a big risk for people who don't normally do that. So it spoke a lot to the comfort level of the group.* Michael commented humorously: *At one point in Amber's house we were changing the words to songs to reflect our frustration! Being able to change the lyrics, you just don't do that with someone you don't know. You have to build relationship before something like that can happen.*

Emily added her comments on the value of the relationships in the group: *The bonding, for example, when we went to Amber's was, I felt, a very valuable professional development session. Also the talk. The dialogue that I remember the most was in the car, and the importance of relationship building. That has been the biggest lesson for me from this group.*

A Collective Spirit Nurtures Growth

A third profound learning the group gained was that the more we linked together, the greater our knowledge expanded and we thrived. Each time that we met, we engaged at a different level. Growing together and merging our ideas into a new collectiveness taught us the importance of co-laboring and being partners in this process. We became more intense knowers of ourselves, of one another and of our work as principals. Access to one another's learning created increased resiliency and adaptability within our group. In Bob's view: *There are many people that don't have resources to draw on, so they make up the world as they go through things, which is dumb. With whatever new learning that you've gleaned, you really look at what you're doing again, as you always do. [We must engage in] constant reflection in this job.* None of us joined the research group to accomplish less. All of us wanted more. Emily described it this way: *I think any time you enter something like this, you learn from it. You feel you have something to give, but I think you come out of it with more in the end.* We were entwined with one another, not separate individuals fighting for our independence. Issues of power and control, for the most part, were set aside as we struggled to make meaning and grow together.

Because our conversations highlighted the importance of partners over topic, the importance of being there and wanting to be there often became more important than what was being discussed. Telling and retelling stories where both the researcher's and the participants' voices were heard, formed the collaborative effect of narrative inquiry. We were, in Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) words, "engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (p. 4). This encouraged in our group a pledge to learning and exploring, and gave us boundaries for how we acted and what we endorsed. From our conversations together, we not only learned facts, but also trust, confidence, and the importance of relationships in human interactions (Noddings, 1994). However, in a group of nine persons, it seemed inevitable that there would be some drop-off. We had hoped that our shared story would unfold with all voices enacting it. But principals are busy people and one member with a young family found it very difficult to attend our bi-weekly sessions. Listen to Helen's words as she describes her dilemma: *I had the time where I missed, I think it was the time when you were at Amber's, that was a real coming together for the group. And I couldn't make it and I guess Paul wasn't able to either, but I think that was a real forging time for people. I felt guilty when I couldn't go. I felt that I was letting the group down or letting you down. I don't have regrets of being a member; it's just, "Was I the member that I should be?" If you make a commitment, you carry through; and if you don't carry through, you've failed. My guess would be that I wasn't really part of the group, would be my sense.*

Paul also had the same sense: *Everybody ended up at Amber's, and I couldn't make it. The group members gelled together there, and some of us weren't part of that. I definitely felt that the time you spent together there was very, very positive.*

Being physically absent from the group some of the time obviously created dilemmas for Helen and Paul. However, others sometimes felt the dilemma of feeling absent in the conversations, even when they were physically present. In our first meetings, not all group members felt comfortable sharing their views. Amber put it this way: *The first night we were there I felt outside, because there were a lot of people who knew each other. I didn't feel uncomfortable; I just knew I was outside of that group. Experience-wise, I was [outside], because when people started talking about what they did and how long they'd been doing this, I thought, I don't even know if I really belonged here. It was obviously a powerful group, and there were incredibly powerful and very different individuals in the group.*

The first two or three meetings I disagreed with what some people were saying and how they were sorting things out. I thought, "That's okay, that's good, because it means I know how I believe really firmly and really strongly." I made some early assumptions where I'm not at any more because now we know each other personally, on a much deeper level.

Research on group dynamics often talks about stages in a group—forming, norming, and storming are terms popularized by Johnson and Johnson (1987). Each term describes a stage of development that groups generally move through as they grow together. Forming describes how a group begins its work together and the experiences and social skills needed to get along agreeably. Norming is a context where certain conditions have been met and members are in concert with one another's views. Finally, storming describes a group where disagreement has been breached and group members feel free to share their dissonant ideas. The comments ahead by Amber illustrate some of the storming moments we experienced: *I found I connected with what Joan was saying really early on about report cards. I remember reading a story about how insulted a teacher was that a principal had [read them]—and I've always felt that way too. I felt Joan thinking a little differently about that.* Margaret interrupted*: It was going to make us or break us, I felt, that evening. That's really interesting that you felt so strongly. I can't recall from the transcripts you coming to anybody's defense...* Amber: *No, I wouldn't have, that night. And I don't say much, because usually what I say is so stupid and so different from what everybody else. I don't mean stupid as in not valuable, but it's just so not the same that I just don't say much. I guess it's a defense, in a way, of what you believe. I still* *have a hard time; I haven't articulated my beliefs enough to defend them yet. I know what I believe, and I hope I walk it, but I felt that the group had been doing what they've been doing long enough, that they've talked about it long enough, that they've really sorted it out, and I was still sorting out. I'm still pretty careful about what I say; I think principals always will be. I don't think it'll matter where you are or whom you're with, you still think before you open your mouth. I do it less with this group than any other group now, which is very comforting and very nice.*

Comfort in the group took some persons longer than others to establish. Joan made this remark: *We never got to a point in this group that you eventually get to in the others, that level of where you'll be angry and upset with each other. We've not yet reached that level of comfort where we rant and rail.* Bob retorted: *I didn't tell you that you ticked me off?* with Emily joining in: *You have to reach a crisis in order to find out what it is the group is made of.* Finally, Joan came back: *In many of the groups I've worked in, we often work to the level of hitting conflict and working it through, but more often we go around it with good manners and politeness and never deal with it. That's why this group never feels like my administration group. We have conflict there, but we never work all the way through it, so we never get to that level where we can grow together.*

The feeling within the group was strong that we had taken an open and constructive way that encouraged each one of us to be flexible and willing to listen and learn. There was no withdrawal of energy or self but rather a growing commitment to each other. We had learned to sidestep our fearfulness and become braver about our practical knowledgeable voices.

Group Processes Strengthened our Experience

The connection between the narrative and the growth of our identity, the importance of shaping our own stories, and being open to the variety and articulateness of others' stories was fundamental to our work together. Emily commented: *If I was to be totally honest, there was probably a bit of a cover story. I don't know if people truly opened up and shared their vulnerabilities in a group, although I think we did to some extent. I think it's high risk when we all have our own individual reputations in different districts. Therefore, you're sometimes not as willing to be quite as vulnerable as you might be because you're not totally sure that your stories will stay there. So I felt sometimes that I'm not sure that we got as deep as we wanted to. I wondered if we weren't playing it safe a little sometimes.*

Michael had a different view: *I think people were very honest. I didn't feel there was anyone who gave us a cover story, told us only what we wanted to hear, that didn't tell us about some of the challenges they have, things that are going well, and those are difficult to share.*

Helen described how she saw the process unfold: *That's what the group was—looking at our lives as principals. We were sitting, being involved, but we were sitting back from our lives, being involved and sitting back. And sometimes someone would take the ball, and three or four would be talking, and the rest of us would sit back quietly while we were watching. At that point we were the observers and mulling it over, and then we'd be in and they'd be out. It was, I think, fairly even—I had a sense of a very even group, that the leadership was taken by the person who needed* *to do it at that moment and no one else was. There didn't seem to be a power struggle.*

Our group engaged in what Oakley (1981) described as oral conversation between pairs or groups of individuals marked by equality felt among participants and flexibility that allows participants to establish the form and content of their experience. The research participants that gathered together were empathic and respectful of one another. Our conversations moved around and covered many kinds of activities. As Helen saw it: *I wish I could have the conversations with staff that we were able to have as a group. Not that those conversations don't occur with staff, but once you get into the routine that starts happening in schools, you really need to work at cultivating it, working with people and having conversations, because people can just say, "Hi, how are you?" and no more. The conversations were really rich; those are my memories. And when I reflect on having those times with staff, they are really important. If you don't, you do miss out. How do you bring people into the group and make them feel welcomed? As soon as I was able to pick up again [rejoin the group], it was as if I hadn't been away. So I think it was the level of familiarity we had established right from the start, which was a very safe environment to talk, and that made the difference.*

Paul found the group affirmed much of the work he was doing already. His comments: *I definitely found the experience a learning experience. There were some frustrating times as a learner and as a listener, but for the most part I found it a very positive—I was looking forward to going. I always found it to be positive; I wasn't saying, "Oh, no, not again tonight."*

I think any time that I get together with other people who share the same milieu and share the same concerns, I really do enjoy hearing other people's points of view. Some things I don't comment on, because there's no issue for me, or I don't want to be there, and I found that to be an interesting thing. I found there were a lot of things that we talked about and said, "Hey! Things are going pretty good, in terms of how I'm thinking about things, how I see things." A lot of affirming and encouraging kinds of things, and a lot of learning too in terms of hearing people talk about different environments and how they handle different environments.

Teresa was even more reflective in her remarks*: "Life is lonely at the top." And within the school, life is lonely at the top sometimes. To be able to speak to a group of people who have common experiences has been a real bonus, to hear how other people handle things, and to hear that you're not the only one handling them is helpful. Remember last week when we talked about parents who are bullies? I never framed it in those words, but when I heard somebody say that, I thought, "Oh my God! Somebody understands that, somebody else is having that experience." I think, in almost every experience we have, we question ourselves, " Did I handle this right? Are my values in place?" So for me, that has been one of the most important things—the collegiality and then the opportunity to see and observe practice.*

Bob rounded out this conversation by recalling Senge's (1990) description of a community of learners: *You could describe this group as a community of learners. I think we made that shift. Open, empathic sharing. There was a sense of trust amongst the group that developed through the communication—verbal, visual, and body* *language. There was a lot of communication going on—sharing this, sharing that, baring your soul.*

A Knowledge Community Emerged

In the linking up with the other members of the group, we realized a fifth profound learning. In giving away some of our freedom to become a group, we became more open to creative forms of expression. While each of us maintained ourselves, we enriched that same self by sharing new meaning and inviting different contributions. We responded to the moment and often changed as we went along. For some persons in the group, this was quite acceptable. Others liked to know what was in store for them. As Emily put it: *We were really into our work, even though we looked at it [our role] differently. For instance, trying to help out one person that's getting started in a new situation develops a mentoring relationship. The whole thing was a kind of mentorship, I felt. I loved getting the different points of view from different people, from different districts. That was the power of the group, to me, personally.*

Developing a voice is an important part of learning, whether alone or in a group. We were silent in the beginning, we received knowing, we learned to know, we constructed our knowing. This pattern continually turned back on itself as we struggled in our knowledge community to negotiate meaning. Recall Amber's words: *I don't say much, ...I guess it's sort of a defense, in a way, of what you believe. I still have a hard time; I haven't articulated enough to defend it yet. I know what I believe, and I hope I walk it, but I guess I felt that the group had been doing what they've* *been doing long enough, that they've talked about it long enough, that they've really sorted it out, and I was still sorting out.*

Diversity Became Our Friend

I still see lots of diversity in that group and I love that, because it just makes me really stretch. Amber echoed the strong response to the issue of diversity in the group. One of the most interesting aspects of this group of people was the fact that they represented five different school districts, two rural and three urban. Each of the three urban districts was quite different, from the largest with 165 schools, to 85 schools, to the smallest with 15 schools. The perspectives coming from each of these five districts added a variety that was both challenging and interesting. The size of the schools, ranging from 430 to 140 students, was also a factor. Generally the larger a school, the more complex the relationship patterns and interactions become. However, the smallest school in our group was identified as inner city with a myriad of special needs. This adds a major complication in the day-to-day operation of the school as it means more support staff, hot lunch programs, and increased contact with community social service agencies. Thus size isn't always the definitive factor in determining complexity.

Another factor affecting diversity in the group was that the participants ranged in principalship experience from 27 years to two years. Thus, our group had voices of experienced practice and voices of newness blending together. Finally, there were several significant program differences in the schools represented. One school was a junior-senior French Immersion program, two others had academic challenge programs. Add to this the diverse personalities inherent in nine different human beings that are principals by profession!

Understanding the Professional Knowledge Landscape

Does professional development always have to look a certain way? As a result of our work we enjoyed a deeper understanding of Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) research into teachers' professional knowledge landscapes: "Professional development, according to the sacred story, is not an occasion for enjoyment; it is serious business. It is not an occasion for informal activities in personal settings, but a time for formal activities in professional settings" (p. 127). This sacred story that real professional development is only formal, organized, and agenda-driven was not upheld by our experience. The personal experiences shared in a trusting environment resulted in new interpretations, and called into question some of our beliefs and actions, yet were enjoyable and satisfying.

Emily's comments captured this: *That to me was the power of the group. It was so fluid and so unstructured that sometimes it felt like you weren't doing anything. If you're not task oriented, it can't be worthwhile. And one of the things about groups is that a lot of them feel that they had to be task oriented to be validated. In our society of doers, we are not validated for just being. This group was validated for just being. Although we talked about the doing, we didn't have to do anything; we just had to be.* These were powerful words coming from Emily. She had captured what every counselor, therapist, and teacher, yearns for—a self-actualizing experience. Rogers (1955) in his work on being and becoming, described this state as becoming what one is capable of being. The epitome of a community learning together, it occurs when there is empathy, positive self-regard, and rapport amongst persons.

Michael finished our conversation with a similar affirmation: *The whole experience of being part of this group has been wonderful. The valuable learning from each other that went on when we met, the bonding with the individuals has made the difference to learning in this group.*

I find that I'm more aware of always building, building, building relationship with staff. And sometimes it really comes down to that, building relationship, not only with staff, but also with kids and with parents. I think now, "What am I doing? Or what strategies can I put into place to bond even more with these people?" I've really reflected on that.

Attitude is everything. If you go in with a positive attitude that I'm going to learn something from these people, a group of administrators who have years of experience, who can teach me a lot.

Reflecting on Things Unseen

As a group we learned about things we weren't looking for, influences and behaviors we hadn't anticipated. Looking back, our work together was an act of faith and, as such, we hoped for things unseen but helpful to us. In Bob's words: *The learning that's happened through the dialogue, the conversations, has really changed things, changed the way I think about situations and made me really rethink some of my practices. After the first meeting with the people, I realized, Here are some people I can learn from! New level of thinking, right?* That capacity to be alert to the moment for what was unfolding was repeated over and over again. We all learned that being vigilant for the newly discovered, the newly visible, was an important part of our asking questions and re-thinking assumptions. We became more conscious participants willing to accept and notice things we didn't know would be important. As Michael put it: *Another learning for me was the importance of my own professional development and that it's a constant; I have to always be looking at that and refining and refocusing what I do to make me a better educator. I really enjoyed the honesty, when people said, "I'm having a problem with this. Can we brainstorm some strategies? Some ideas?" I really appreciated that, because then that made me think, Okay, now, this is my situation. What can I do? Who can I speak to? What advice can I get from people?*

Unpredictability of Our Experiences

Hard as it is to live with and accept, life is unpredictable. Another learning, the ninth, we engaged in without our obvious planning for it, related to the quality of surprise. Although I had written what I believed (as I hope did my committee!) a thorough proposal, I knew my completed dissertation would turn the proposal inside out. While not a surprise for me, I believe it may have engendered an element of surprise in others. The writing became an exciting, exhilarating, refreshing opportunity to tell stories about personal and social knowledge.

As researcher I went into every group session not sure what would transpire. It wasn't until after many readings of the text and after I began to write, that the story unfolded. I was seldom sure what was going to emerge and it seemed that every chapter took on a life of its own! The stories formed a new and different composite, informed, influenced and comprised by the wide variety of persons, places and things involved in the making. The participants in the group could relate to the element of surprise as well. As I passed my writing on to them, they were often taken with the nuances and subtleties their conversations had yielded.

Trust as a Major Component

How well we worked together was a witness to how we experienced one another. With trust, we created the relationships we needed to ensure that even more conversations with even more divergent views could emerge. We learned that we could work with those from whom we have been separate. Thinking back over the many stories that were told, Teresa's story included in chapter six comes to mind. In their different places and diverging views, Teresa and her teacher came to a decision about how they would belong and work together. In Teresa's words: *There's got to be a way to be energetic or do a great job. Why can't we let people do their thing? Why can't we accept that we all have different gifts or talent? Let their lights shine. We don't have to be afraid of what we don't have, but we're afraid of the power we do have.*

Recall Helen's words as another powerful witness to this idea: "Was I the member that I should be?" If you make a commitment, you carry through; and if you don't carry through, you've failed. My guess would be that I wasn't really part of the group, would be my sense. Yet listen to one of her colleagues describe her in the group: When she [Helen] came that last time, I knew we had missed something really special, I felt that all along. But even just the little bit that she was there—she's got an incredible voice. I wanted to know more because I've read her work and I feel like I know her through that. Not that it's going to happen now, but she could have been a really important part of this, and still is a really important part of it.

We also learned that change can be enticing but deceptive. Change is usually material in form in that it replaces or displaces something else. We were concerned that the change in the teacher evaluation policy, albeit a worthy one, was a material one, often on paper only. Our focus as a group was tested as we negotiated the meaning of this change for us as principals. The fact that the policy did not address what we believed to be the real change–the human processes beneath any kind of evaluative, reviewing process– became a concern. As we struggled to make sense of "what was coming down the pipe," we recognized the detritus of imposed prescriptive behavior. In its vision, the Framework of Teaching (1996) document describes what's best for teachers and principals. It was imposed from a place on the landscape very distant from classrooms and schools. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) call this the sacred story—the theory-driven view of practice shared by practitioners, policy-makers, and theoreticians. To make the changes recommended in the new teacher evaluation policy, we learned we would have to understand first what worked best for us as a group of learners. The message from our stories of teacher growth was overwhelming—attend to the dynamics of the persons involved. We learned that this meant spending copious amounts of time talking with people, sharing information openly, setting trustful environments in place, posing leading questions, and integrating new discoveries and learnings into a coherent understanding for all. We invoked the original research question: How do principals enable the reciprocal processes—those actions that invoke trust, reconstruct old assumptions, construct different meanings, and embody new behaviors or intentions—that provide opportunities that promote and sustain continuous learning among teachers? And examined how we had answered it. Michael explained it this way: *I have to have a positive relationship with people on staff, which could always be better, before I can constructively work with them. Now I think, "What am I doing? Or what can I put into place to bond more with these people?" I've really reflected on that. For example, one individual in my school likes me to pop in after school when she's in her room working to see how things are going, or to see what I can help her with. She also has really appreciated me leaving notes on her blackboard: "I really love the display in the hallway. What a fabulous job!" That really has made a world of difference.*

The Importance of the Freedom of Speech

With information and knowledge set free within a group, new ideas grew up anywhere with any person. Listen to Amber as she described this in our knowledge community: *We moved in all kinds of [conversational] spaces, and I really stretched. When I go home I'm really different...I do this because I know it'll take me to a whole other place. It does every time.* We found that as we remained open to relationships our beliefs about information and who held it changed. We recognized the importance of circulating the good news and sharing ideas and, as a result, we all grew from the sharing. We acknowledged the same would be true in our schools and mentally gave ourselves permission to become less protective and more open with the people with whom we work and play. We became story hunters, story breakers, and storytellers with an earnest wish to tell others and re-tell with others the stories of what we were doing or what we were trying to do. We understood how to belong together and how we would continue to enact that belonging in our lives and schools. Bob saw it this way: *But the learning that's happened through the dialogue, conversations, has really changed things, changed the way I think about situations and made me really rethink some of my practices. After the first meeting with the people, I realized, there are some people here I can learn from! New level of thinking, right? So, yes, if you just talk about professional development, the professional development that has come through the process has been much better for me than any trip to San Antonio for PD.*

Just as Bob personalized the learning for himself, so too, did Michael: *Every year I look at objectives for myself: "These are some things that I'm going to be focusing on this year." But also what I've been doing is, "Okay, these are the objectives; these are some things I'm going to be working on. But what is my plan of action? What are some things that I need to do to achieve that goal?" And then one step further is indicators of success: "How do I know I'm achieving that goal or not?"*

I always put myself in the shoes of the other individual and say, "I know myself, in my principalship, what I think is really going well, and these are some key areas I need to still keep working on." And there could be an area that someone could give me a suggestion with, or from within you know, Yes, I need to get on top of this area more. I need to really focus on that. Another learning for me was the importance of my own professional development and that it's a constant; I have to always be looking at that and refining and refocusing what I do to make me a better educator. I really enjoyed the honesty, like when people said, "I'm having a problem with this. Can we brainstorm some strategies? Can we brainstorm some ideas?" And I really appreciated that, because then that made me think, Okay, now, this is my *situation. What can I do? Who can I speak to? What advice can I get from people? So I found the learning just wonderful.*

Bob: *I've recommended this approach every time I talk to somebody. As a matter of fact, I told my assistant principal this morning "You need to pick up on this. You need to get together with people from other districts and form professional development dialogue groups because they are so powerful." "The experts are among us" is the reality.*

We have many groups in life, and there are groups within that group that people cannot enter no matter what they do, because of conversations having taken place and the level of trust, the experiences, the shared experiences, aren't there. It's really interesting. I have spent some time thinking about the group, of course, and thinking about other people's experiences and how they're missing out by not having a group like this to share with.

Bob's comments resonated for many of us who have struggled to find a safe and welcoming place to share our ideas. Equally important, we, as group members, acknowledged the opportunities to visit each other and share practical knowledge. Teresa commented on the advantages of this: *The other thing I think it comes down to is the networking— talking to Emily about the experiences of opening a new school, talking to others about experiences with special education. And then, one of the neat things that has come out of this is that I got talking to Michael again. I really liked going to the schools. I've got my journal, and I've used that. I've picked up ideas out of those meetings that I've used already in our school this year. And, of course, I've got my new school file going, so that was even with that new school in the back of my* *mind all the time, so I've put a lot of things in that file. So, yes, I liked going to the schools.*

Michael added his remarks on the importance of visiting the schools: *I also know that seeing is believing, and going to the schools has really made the difference for me. Because people can share things that are going on in their school; but you get to know more of the flavor of the school and the style of the administrator, the way he or she likes to work with staff and community and children. Because of our relationship in this group, one of the schools, Teresa's, has helped us out doing a variety of projects for us.* Many interactions occurred within and beyond the group that were unknown to most of us. This was another significant clue that the relationships that we were building had far-reaching effects for the participants.

Researcher as Participant

One of our difficulties in carrying out this collaborative research project had to do with gaining an understanding that we were co-laboring together. My role as researcher in this group was relatively undefined. I wanted to be viewed as a participant and necessarily as a researcher. I took the role of participant purposely in order to level the landscape and encourage everyone to feel a part of the whole. My efforts, while not totally successful, were recognized.

Michael: *At the beginning I saw you as the researcher, but as we journeyed through it, I began to see you more and more as a part of the group, especially because you were very amenable to keep meeting even after the main part of your research was done. You felt, we can still keep going with this, and this was a support to us.*

Amber added her thoughts: *I saw you as a member of the group, because you often talked about your experiences as a principal, reliving and rethinking, "I've been in that position; I've had to suffer through this myself. This is what I did." No, I didn't see you as someone sitting outside watching the group and writing up her scientific notes, sitting above or beyond the group, but rather, very much a member of the group.*

In their article, "Working in the Interpretive Zone" (1996), Wasser and Bresler commented on the importance of the research presence and how the interactions of the researcher with the participants serve to shape study outcomes. This shift, they say, is occurring in tandem with the increasing recognition of the collective nature of knowing and our greater attention to social theories of development. By working in "the interpretive zone" (Wasser & Bresler, 1996), multiple voices and viewpoints were encouraged, and participants had an opportunity to bring together their different kinds of knowledge, experiences, and beliefs, hopefully forging new meanings through the process of joint inquiry.

Emily shared her insights on the relaxed boundaries of the group: *I see all of us in the group. I considered you to be part of the group. You were the researcher, but at the same time you were part of the group. It wasn't like we were the group and you were tapping the group.* Living a narrative inquiry defined our places and voices of researchers and teachers less by role. As we concerned ourselves with the questions of collaboration, trust, and relationship in the living, storying, and restorying of our collaborative research life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5), the question of who was researcher and who was participant became less important.

Less important, but not entirely without problems, the question of researcher or participant is an important issue to examine after the fact. There were some difficult moments as researcher/participant. I was reticent to speak out or in any way try to lead the group. This was problematic because there were moments when we floundered and needed some direction. At these times, I felt I had to step in and give more shape to the events. Other times I felt the concern as researcher that one person or another was taking too much time in the group. Part of me, as researcher, wanted to end the conversation and move on to other issues, while part of me, as participant, said I had no right to think that. Lastly there was sometimes a feeling of resentment on my part that I alone had the responsibility to organize the group. Often I wanted to just be a participant and not a researcher as the latter role held many other responsibilities I would have willingly shared!

Identity in our Group

As principals we knew who we were and had chosen to compel our actions and behaviours accordingly. We were clear but not rigid about our direction both as individuals and group members. Although a group of strong persons, there was always room for uncertainty, ambiguity, and vulnerability. Understanding that about ourselves deepened our convictions about teachers with whom we work. Rigidity breeds certainty and we recognised the importance of openness and surprise. The word "diversity" came up often in conversations describing our group—I believe it spoke about our beliefs, doubts, and differences. No one stood hard in their certainties, suppressing disturbances. We allowed that problems were our friends. In retrospect, the group has continued to carry on, perhaps because of its curiosity and appetite for learning. We formed for a reason, that reason doubled back on itself. We became what we were studying to know. Listen to Amber describe our work: *I don't think there are any other places that I know of where groups of people like this are getting together. Any superintendent worth his or her salt would think "Wow! Here are these incredibly gifted talented people who are getting together every six weeks. I still see lots of diversity in the group, and I love that, because it just makes me really stretch. I know every time I come, no matter where we are, even if we're not talking about school, the people really make me stretch.*

Amber's reflections embody the hopes and prayers of all teachers and researchers. They illustrate the need we all have to continue becoming, to be coherent and to seek meaning in all that we undertake. They represent our attempts to develop our capacities as fully functioning human beings, reaching out for greater awareness, fuller responses to the complexity of our lives. By reflecting on who we are and who we will become, we move into places where change materialises as new responses to former questions and problems.

Next Steps

A number of group members have spoken about continuing after the research is finished. This often becomes the researcher's dilemma as group members expect the researcher to organize and set up the meetings. In our group we have already extended our original plans and are beginning our second year together. We have negotiated how to continue and have agreed that each of us will in turn host a session at our schools. Attendance will be voluntary and the members will design the focus. This process has already begun as Michael attests *I quite enjoyed having the group at my school and sharing. And I also noticed that when you host it, you had an* *opportunity to dialogue more. I saw the person who hosted in any particular session as the lead person. You were the emcee, you were the animator, and you put it all together. You had an opportunity to share where you worked, and you led the dialogue and discussions. If one person hosted at their school or wherever and did the arranging and organizing, and we carried on from there, I think that would be fabulous!*

Paul added his comments: *I would like to see something carry on. I feel I have a need for meeting with people who do the same thing I do, other principals or vice principals, and talking about some of the issues. Now, I've talked to Teresa, and I know she's talked to you about it. Some of the times it would be nice to focus and say, "I've really got something going on in my school this year, and I need to have some help here. Is it something everybody wants to talk about?" It might be one or two topics that people want to work with. And I want to keep it fun. You don't want to write up an agenda or anything to that effect. I think that there's enough smarts in the group that it would be valuable for all of us.*

Teresa also commented: *But now I'm really ready for that next stage that we talked about, to identify some issues and to work on some issues. I would really like to have that opportunity to work on some issues. Again, there's the thing about talking about practice. You know those professional conversations that [Roland] Barth talks about? I think that's so important to our development, and I think that's what I really enjoy.*

Amber felt much the same way: *Yes, we journey apart and together, and apart and together. I'm hoping this group, in a sense, has that kind of ability to hold* *itself in a journey of reflective practice, because I don't think we're just school principals and it's just limited then to my role there. I think that it's much larger than that and we bring our whole person to the experience. I think we need to write as a group. That's where I thought if we had something to hold us that way, we might anyway; just the relationship now might be enough.*

Journey's End

We had finally come to a formal end of our journey. All that was left was to continue to share the writing as chapters were read and reviewed by participants. What had we learned explicitly and implicitly? We now knew there is a place where our voices could be heard unconditionally, and where we felt secure and authenticated. We felt valued in this place and felt our day to day practical knowledge was respected and useful. Our knowledge community understood that where we were, and what we discussed mattered less than how we treated one another and considerately treated each other's thoughts and ideas. We now knew that a knowledge community could describe any group of persons willing to listen and learn from each other and share personal practical knowledge in a communal setting. We also knew that uncertainty, surprise, and ambiguities are key parts of our day-to-day work and life. We need to accept this and be open to it. We acknowledged that change is ever present and likely material in form. We need to exchange the material form for an immaterial one by attending to the human endeavors inherent in the process beneath the change.

But is there more to learn? Is our learning together really over? Can relationships such as these come to an end, with no further contact. We don't think so.

We believe that immutable contacts have been made and it is not in our power to change or alter that. While none of us feel forced to continue, we may well choose to do so. What will our future be? Time will tell.

Chapter Eight

The Rest of the Story

> *The millennium approaches. Times are changing. Structures are crumbling. Reference points are vanishing. We are left only with questions and choices. Tough questions; frightening choices. What are our belief systems? Are the structures that support them still serving us? Are we clear enough–brave enough–to interrogate our actions? What commitment are we making to the force of compassion? Who are we and what do we choose to believe? Voices call from many directions. Which way do we go? (Cooper, 1996, p. 5).*

This study first emerged from a personal need to rethink my own questions and concerns about the meaning of teaching and learning. It came at a time when, as a principal, I felt that the climate in education was increasingly becoming oppressive. The back-to-the-basics, conservative movement, on the one hand, was growing and thriving whereas my own beliefs about constructivist learning and the importance of relationships in teaching were being decried, on the other. Aligning my views with respect to student accountability and achievement results with the department of education's perspective was becoming increasingly difficult. The escalating popularity of achievement tests to account for student learning was another sore point. Equally unjustifiable, schools were deemed satisfactory, or not, based on the results of those tests. Lastly, the voices of parents were becoming stronger and more vocal, often demanding that we return to the past, where classrooms were silent, students sat obediently in desks, and teachers authoritatively delivered information from the front of the room.

Today, many of us who are principals feel we have had to become managers and accountants, rather than educators and leaders. We are struggling with increasing costs and decreasing services and a sense of a we-they perspective: in schools, in the community, in the department of education. The changing role of the principal as school-based management strategies are implemented is significant. We are expected to bring most decisions to staff for consensus where an open dialogue is encouraged. There are numerous and important changes occurring all at once on the landscape.

Thus, I believe it is important to place my study in this educational context. Amidst the many other changes, a major policy change in the teacher evaluation process was also under consideration. This presented me with an opportunity to step back from the fray and re-examine what I valued about education in the first place. In completing this work, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how we, as principals, enable teachers' learning, despite increased pressures and changing responsibilities. By examining our practices in light of this policy change, I discovered that there are many principals, despite the difficulties that they are encountering on the landscape, who are making a sincere effort to support and dignify the efforts of teachers and to encourage conversations about teaching with them. Again and again, through the stories of the principals in this group, I learned that there are teachers who continue to teach in ways that are purposeful, that honor meaning, that repeatedly search for discovery. In this study, I have tried to relate the poignant and passionate stories of some principals whose efforts to create opportunities to converse with teachers about teaching and learning are making a difference.

Reflections on the Learning

On looking back over the past year, several major themes emerge for me from this project. First of all, the research approach I used and the effect it had on my experience in the project was remarkable. Embarking on a qualitative study, using a narrative approach, was a first for me. Greene (1991) says it eloquently, "The sounds of story-telling are everywhere" (p. 51) and I discovered just how accurate this statement was. The principals I assembled were a group of avid story-tellers, story-hunters, and story-breakers. From hundreds of pages of transcripts and hours of taped conversations, I was able to tease out the stories that underlined and elaborated my research question: What are the actions of principals in enabling teacher growth and development? Working with a large research group (eight participants), for an extended period of time (fifteen months currently), collecting stories allowed me to learn more about interpretative studies. Hearing those stories raised for me the following reflections on how principals can assist and make possible the professional growth of teachers.

Enabling Actions

Working in an interpretative approach presented dilemmas to me just as other research methods had in the past. Researchers often talk about the pure objectivity of quantitative methods, that numbers only tell the truth, and there are no subjective influences. In contrast, qualitative methods give rise to questions of validity and reliability, both of which are still questionable in either methodology. It is not unheard-of to crunch numbers or re-work percentages to change statistical outcomes. Similarly, I encountered moments when I struggled not to take participants' words out of context or edit words to change the meaning of a person's story for my own purposes. A story vividly comes to mind early in my research project that reflects this point.

I had passed the first chapter of my writing to the research group participants for feedback. Nervous about their response, I was anxious to hear their comments. One week passed and after relating my concerns to a supervisor, she suggested that I call some of them directly. Their responses for the most part were positive. One participant was concerned about how she appeared in her story and asked if she might write another version. I willingly complied. I received no other comments until much later, when I received a written note. It was quite lengthy and described my writing positively. It finished with this question: "Are you sure these are my words?" I was struck by the implication. I immediately went back to my tapes and transcripts and re-read the piece. It was as I had told it, word for word. This was my first realization that no method is without its deceptions. I decided to speak directly to the participant to get a better sense of the concern. It centered mainly on the fact that at the time of telling the person spoke more openly than had been planned. In retrospect, it was decided that if others, particularly family members, were to read this writing, they might be adversely affected. The participant then re-told me the story in a way that was preferable and I subsequently re-wrote the piece. However, in my naivete with using an interpretative method, the experience illuminated to me the pitfalls inherent in it. As I reflect back on this, I now understand that what I grasped from the passage was quite different from the participant believed was revealed. It acknowledged for me in my work with the research group and as a principal, the importance of making meaning. How we negotiate meaning with teachers will be, I believe, an important challenge. This raised for me the reminder that I must constantly pay attention to meaning, and provide opportunities for people to re-interpret and revise their thinking on things. In this way, we are able to support and uphold teachers' professional judgement.

A second learning for me came from the experience of working with a large group. There is a critical role principals play in creating a trusting community where staff can make and share meaning for the purposes of growth and development. The challenge I had, as researcher, was to build and, perhaps, model an ecological community in our community of nine. Since constructivist learning is a social endeavor, community, the medium through which growth transpires, is essential for learning to occur. The members of our community worked together, relying on and trusting one another. We attempted to keep the separation between us minimal by shifting our roles and responsibilities based on people's experience, their expertise, or sheer expediency. Our efforts to make the community ecological–fluid and continuously growing–were successful and we continue to maintain and sustain ourselves, even now in our second year together. An equitable environment, where we treated one another with dignity and fairness, was continuously upheld. Many times I heard words such as Teresa's repeated: *I know I've learned a lot of things from the other people—there were so many gifts around the table, and we were so different.* The respect for one another was telling.

Lastly, our group displayed an evolutionary quality, in that we thrived and changed together even though there were setbacks and threats to our growth. This approach raised for me an awareness of the importance of consciously working to build the substance of a group. Even more so, building an equitable, evolutionary group that accepts and encourages its members to work and grow together was my goal and may be considered the goal of principals who are trying to foster a constructivist spirit in their schools. One participant, Bob, described it this way: *[As principal], you have to be "up" all the time. Your tone, gestures, and manner are reflected in your staff. If you truly believe your teachers, students, and parents should be treated with respect and dignity at all times, then you must act this way. Model, model, model.* The acknowledgement of each person's contribution to the whole, I believe, cannot be underestimated. Everyone had a gift that enhanced our wholeness.

In forming and building an evolutionary community, one particular threat in a group our size related to our staying together and continuing to exchange meaningful ideas. We struggled in the group as one member moved in and out of the discussions, yet no one was prepared to accept the loss of her voice. Nine participants including myself meant careful monitoring of time within the group. It inevitably meant that some people were concerned that their voices were not heard. This is an important issue that was raised by the research. Large groups have a great deal to offer in the bountiful material they can generate. But extra care and attention must be paid to more silent members to ensure they are given opportunities to express themselves. As well, the research effort raised in me the attention one must pay to the silences in a group. It is easy to rush in and fill the spaces with words. As a researcher and as a principal, I am more mindful of the importance of silent moments for reflection and further thought.

A third reflection comes to mind about the dynamics of the group. Power in a group is often accorded by status. There were several individuals in the group who had many years of experience and many experiences to draw upon for stories. These persons appeared to take a stronger voice in the study. They told longer stories and were looked upon for affirmation when others told their stories. Emblematic of larger issues in pedagogy, voice is significant in education. As principals and teachers, I believe, we need to pay attention to whose voice is heard in classrooms and how often. As a result of my work in this project, I am more aware of the important enabling action of acknowledging all voices, no matter how indistinct or inarticulate, in the process of learning.

The study also presented a unique opportunity to explore how principals interpret new policy. By delving into our responses to the change in teacher evaluation policy, the study demonstrated Connelly and Clandinin's (1996) conceptualization of policy implementation as discussed in *Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes*. As Emily phrased it, *There were some cover stories. It's hard to reveal yourself when there are people from other districts that can judge you.* Connelly and Clandinin's (1996) notions of *sacred story*–the implementation of policy as driven by government; *secret story*–how teachers and principals actually implement policy, and *cover story*–what we tell others about how we implement policy, provided a fascinating rubric for further analysis. In that deeper examination, we found that even within our trusting community, we were not able to reveal all our secret stories. This raised for me many questions. I was challenged to think about whether or not I had been able to get beneath the cover stories of my participants. By encouraging a sense of safety and trust, I believe I freed people to share their authentic stories about learning and growth. As a group, we supported one another to try and reveal our secret teaching and learning stories. On reflection, several participants commented on how much they had learned from the group about relationships and the importance they play in assisting teachers to begin examining their practices. One participant, Joan, e-mailed these words to me, *I've thought a lot about the role of the group in my life. I feel it served to disturb the soil of my soul and get it ready for a new seed. Thanks for the gifts brought to my life.*

Getting to know one another and feeling a sense of safety and security in the group was fundamental to our success. The use of the narrative portraits in the beginning chapter served to introduce each of us to one another and opened us up to talking about our personal and our professional lives. While we never questioned one another about our narratives, I felt there was a difference in the sensitivity and respect we showed to each other for reading them. Setting the stage for trust and comfort was one of the most important parts of this study. It became obvious to all of us over time that this also would be a fundamental enabling action of principals with teachers.

As we worked through our stories of growth with teachers, many different themes emerged. One of the most prevalent was that planning for learning could take many forms and substances. In our own work together as a group, we recognized that each session had a life of its own, not always strictly planned with an agenda or set of objectives. Some of our most useful sessions were those held away from the typical environment for learning, a more relaxed place on the landscape. This appeared to free people to open up and reveal their stories. Another issue to be noted, setting the stage for trust, security, and personal comfort is key to success. While not always possible to secure in a busy school, it may be noted that even some minute changes, such as serving food or sitting away from a desk, can make a difference.

As a result of our sharing of personal narratives, we moved more quickly as a group to deeper, more sensitive issues. Recall our discussion about teacher union activities and the role of the principal. This was delicate, dangerous ground. Michael's story of a difficult teacher was also revealing of his actions and values. The small disagreement within the group over the principal's role in reporting practices could have caused a major break if there had been a lack of trust and safety.

The personal narratives also served as a springboard to our school visits. Inviting the participants into our places of work was an act of courage and demonstrated again the safety people felt within the group. The school stories relayed more about the people they reflected. We didn't attempt to go into one another's schools with a critical eye but rather as a friends and collaborators. The physical space manifested each principal's beliefs about the importance of certain subject areas or his/her values with respect to children, parents, and learning. Likely because principals are vulnerable when questioned about their school landscapes, inquiring about the landscape–why are you doing it this way?–was not common. The school stories were received rather than constructed. This raised questions for me around the notion of how we in education, unwittingly, maintain the status quo. Perhaps the enabling action of questioning the landscape both for our teachers and for ourselves as principals must remain as a challenge for us in the future. Reminding ourselves of the importance of visiting classrooms and places where teachers work and observing and sharing in the educational and aesthetic aspects of their landscapes is an important enabling action. Perhaps then we will be more able to discern the beliefs and values manifested in those spaces and more openly converse about them. This may also present an opportunity for some teachers, particularly the less articulate or shy, to talk about their continued growth and learning through the lens of their classrooms.

The balance of power in any situation is also important to recognize. In our stories, there are several instances where it is obvious there were structural barriers to the creation of reciprocal relationships. School systems position principals in such a way on the landscape that relationship building is risky. Inherent in the bureaucracy are methods and approaches that stand in the way of authentic relationships and treatment of people as individuals. Recall the story Emily tells of a teacher on her staff who had been moved continuously because of his classroom management problems. Emily worked cautiously and tenderly with that person, finally resolving the dilemma by encouraging and supporting him to consider another profession. The story of his appreciation for her is told eloquently. Other stories, however, relate how several principals reverted to the power of their position to accomplish their ends. These are not so easy to hear. They tell of the lack of equity that still remains between teachers and principals. These are dilemmas that will not disappear. Rather, as constructivist leaders, we will need to continuously consider the power embedded in our position. The issue raised for me the importance of maintaining transparency when working with people. As principals, even though systematic boundaries deter us, we need to uphold dignity and fairness in our actions with others. Embedded in the new teacher evaluation policy is the understanding that evaluation is no longer a top-down bureaucratic motion on principal's part. It is deemed to be an act of professional judgement and the teacher is fully entrusted with choosing professional objectives and ensuring these are met annually. The principal's role is one of mentor, supporter, and collaborator. Trust and a willingness to accept teachers' judgement about their professional development needs, is critical.

This research experience taught me that acknowledging how power is balanced is a critical enabling action. Different people have different needs for power and our task is to help them to release these. By recognizing some of the forces behind people's need for power we can bring moral authority to our conversations.

It took more than a year for our research group to build our strength and coherence as a knowledge community. We met on a regular basis every 2-4 weeks and set our schedule well in advance. Even with this planning, not everyone could attend every session. However, our commitment was established early and most members respected the time we set aside. Taking the time to get to know one another and tell stories about our work and our lives enabled us to get to deeper issues. Listening and conversing, breaking bread together, and celebrating small victories became a critical part of the process and is an important enabling action to consider. Some of the most memorable parts of this research for me were the moments when we sat with a glass of wine or cup of coffee, laughing and telling district tales. The groans of disbelief or the animated responses to yet another good idea were priceless. Had we limited ourselves strictly to an agenda, or to certain firm beginning and ending times, we would never have traveled to some of those places and learned what we did. This clearly pointed out to me the importance of spending time and giving time to build relationships. In the same way, spending an evening overnight with one another, eating, drinking and telling stories was a tremendous bonding experience. We came away refreshed and joyful for the sharing. As Michael described it: *Being able to change the lyrics, you just don't do that with someone you don't know. You have to build relationship before something like that can happen.*

When All Is Said And Done

The final six weeks of the dissertation process presented another opportunity for me to learn. My final defense date had been set, my dissertation was at committee, and I was mentally preparing for this last event.. For me, this was a period of reflection and recollection, a time to savor the experiences that have occurred and to consider your telling of them. For me it became a time to consider what the whole experience had meant and how I had changed my thinking as a result of it. Slowly over the six weeks, I came to realize that the biggest change was my deepened understanding of how an issue is conceptualized and the change that occurs in the initial framing of a problem. When I began my research I needed a concrete issue to hang on to, a problem I could put clearly into words. After fifteen months of working with the research issue, I realized it was not nearly as concrete as I had once thought. The complexity of my question had altered, becoming less concrete, more esoteric. A single answer was not evident, rather the complexity of the responses deepened my understanding with regards to its earlier simplicity. I had been adamant at my candidacy exam that the term "enabled" be a part of the research question. In response to some constructive criticism regarding the dependency inherent in the term's meaning, I argued that it was a positive action word. By the end of my research I came to understand that that particular word was not useful in describing the work of these principals. Where it had once been a reassuring term, "enabling" now carried a different connotation. I rewrote my dissertation title to reflect this deepened understanding. By employing the term "enabling" to describe the role of the principals I had been "stuck" in a view in which principals held the power and "enabled" others to learn. What I knew now did not fit into that view of the world. This change reflected a major shift in my perspective.

A second learning during the waiting period before final defense focused on how I would approach this research differently, given the opportunity. My first thoughts were that I would change very little. The time spent, the work that was accomplished, the results of our conversations and meetings still felt appropriate and worthwhile. However, a part of me wished that we could have felt safe enough to begin digging deeper below the surface and asking more questions. This can be illustrated through our opening stories. Would they have been more revealing if participants had written the stories themselves without my leading questions? The school visits provide another example. The issues that could have been raised during the school visits were not addressed. We were truly guests and not judges and we approached each other and our work places with gentility and by not raising issues. As a group, we often veered away from problematic situations. Recall the time when one member spoke about his approach of writing staff names on the white board to indicate they were in trouble with the "boss". These and other situations demonstrated that we as a group still had room to grow and develop. There existed a need within the group to resolve a problem with an answer, rather than examining and probing the problem. We were surely a "work in progress" and should the group continue to meet and converse, perhaps a move into untrespassed areas such as these would occur.

Finally, the last six weeks before my final defense forced me to look at my role within the group as a participant observer. This started out as a simple role in my eyes. Over the course of the research work I realized it too had its pros and cons. One of the strengths of acting in the manner that I did was that I was able to "resonate" easily with the research data. As I read the transcripts and listened to the tapes I could hear peoples' voices and the inflections of their speech. Doing so brought back many memories of the conversation, and the nuances of the moment. Another strength related to the reciprocity I believed I engendered in the group by sharing my experiences openly. This was a model for how they could speak in the group, and the research participants responded to my candor. As a participant observer, I was able to write the story of our work from the perspective of an audience member and a researcher, embedding the issues within other stories and from different perspectives. My familiarity with each member's words and feelings helped me as I tried to offer a multi-representational approach to the writing of the larger story encompassing, like windows, stories within stories framing each successive theme.

On the other hand, acting as a participant observer was often difficult and downright tedious. I often felt an urgency to move people along on an idea, yet not interfere. There were memories, scraps of conversations that were not always positive, causing anguish and pain as I listened and read. There were moments during our meetings when I didn't know where we were going and if there would be any stories to tell when all was said and done. These were the times when I had to restrain myself from stepping in and taking the group to a place that would look "good" in the transcripts. There were moments when I wanted to insert my beliefs and my opinion, knowing only too well that it would change the direction of the conversation and shut down the person's contribution. As a researcher I framed the larger story and did my best to maintain the integrity of the whole. I believe I did so fairly but as a participant researcher there may have been an element of compromise. These are the ethics of research and some of the trials and successes of acting simultaneously as a participant and researcher.

All of these reflections of my learning as a researcher and my deepened understanding of how principals can empower and give direction to teachers' further learning are neither necessarily profound nor new. These principals' stories are the beginnings to a heightened understanding of what it means to be a constructivist leader. Some of these reflections are theoretical understandings that we in educational circles have held for many years. Our challenge is in whether we can bring them into our practice in an on-going and committed way. If a change in policy is going to be more than a sacred change, we must attend to how we accept the change, bring it into our understanding, and utilize it within our own setting. If our reflections are only that, we have not authentically made meaning for others and ourselves.

Final Remarks

The process of writing a dissertation has been a similar process of learning and reflection for me. In order for change to occur, how we enact meaning must also change. This requires a careful examining of our identity, our self through which we create and perceive.

Through this research process I have developed a different awareness of myself as a learner, teacher, and a researcher. I have been brought to explore my agreements for belonging, the principles that I espouse, and the values shown in my behavior. I claimed for myself the time and silence I needed to complete this work. In doing so, I recalled to myself the deep process of self-making. As a result I changed my awareness of who I was, and the efforts that were at the heart of me. The freedom I was granted and the trust I was shown enabled me to create autonomy I had yet to see in myself. By exploring new connections, and new information, I felt free to gaze outward, bring others into the gaze, and find new and different ways of being. This motion has been attractive to me, such that I don't want to return to the other place I had been. I can now reach out and embrace others and see what I refused to see in the past. More open and inquiring, I am wiser about myself. I no longer fear capacities I may not have. By reaching for them in others, I have gained a greater strength.

Was my learning enabled by the teachers and learners around me? My answer hardly needs articulating. The profound influences my supervisors, my committee, and my research group had on my learning will not be forgotten. They took the time I needed to build a safe and secure relationship where I could risk making mistakes. They encouraged me to use my narrative voice to tell the stories of this research project and elaborate on them. They negotiated meaning with me and upheld my beliefs when I stood strongly on a point. And lastly, they established an equitable, evolving environment where learning was promoted and we enabled each other's growth.

This was a watershed learning experience for me and prompted me to realize that after twenty-five years in education, I still had much to learn! It forced me as an educator to rethink the importance of relationship as well as rethink the reasons behind the silences of some in a community. In thinking again about the importance of coming together as a community to learn, the alternative possibilities of alienation and fragmentation surfaced. It made me realize that people learn when students and teachers are empowered to speak in their own voices and reflect together as they try to bring into being an "in- between" (Arendt, 1958, p.184). As we did in our group, by coming together in local places, we were enabled to inform the conversation and begin to transform our realities.

By seeking each other's experiences and stories of support, I believed we uncovered richer perspectives and arrived at some new discoveries, a different commitment. By gathering as a group of persons with a common interest, we learned from the talk as well as the silences. And by relating our experiences in stories, common themes were illuminated that hopefully will promote a new dialogue with fresh ideas, new dreams. In the words of Maxine Greene, I tried to "attend to the plurality of consciousnesses–and their recalcitrances, their resistances, along with their affirmations, their songs of love" (1995, p.198) in order to make meaning about the research question.

The metaphoric tug-of-war continues to raise questions about our belief systems in regard to teaching and learning. Will they still serve us as we enter the new millennium? Can we challenge our practice and interrogate our actions of teaching and learning? Where is our compassion and how do we as leaders advocate for a better tomorrow, a more valued approach to professional growth, the importance of relationship and the valuing of teachers?

Were there moments of difficulty? Yes, the loneliness in a community of one can be a problem. I seldom felt lonely because of the support of the community within which I was working. Meaning making is not a solitary pursuit but rather transformational and negotiable. I was privileged to have many mentors around me. As I reflect on the past fifteen months, I think of the real joys of meeting new people, listening to their passionate ideas, feeling their pain and surprise–the sounds of storytelling echo in my ears. I recall the many books I read, both fiction and non-fiction, that helped me understand the importance of voice as an emblem of pedagogy. I reminisce about the times I had together with colleagues, presenting papers, writing my proposal, completing my candidacy, exposing my first writing to my supervisors, and growing in wisdom and grace as a result of their nurturing efforts. I believe I have taken this direction in my life seriously yet enthusiastically. It has not been hollow work, self-centered and self-aggrandizing. Rather, it has been a life-giving experience that has created in me a new meaning.

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